

Surviving Modernity: Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī (1863-1943) and the Making of Muslim
Orthodoxy in Colonial India

by

Ali Altaf Mian

Graduate Program in Religion
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved: _____

Ebrahim Moosa, Supervisor

Carl Ernst

Laura Lieber

Leela Prasad

Robyn Wiegman

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Graduate Program in
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2015

ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the shape, substance, and staging of Muslim orthodoxy in British India, concentrating on how orthodox theologians survived colonial modernity by deploying sociological, discursive, psychic, and hermeneutical strategies. This dissertation is organized around Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī (1863-1943), a leading Muslim theologian, mystic, and jurist of colonial India. Thānvī authored hundreds of original treatises, compiled texts, and works of commentary on doctrine and ritual, mystical experience, communal identity, and political theology. His collected letters, recorded conversations, and sermons were published within his lifetime and continue to instruct many contemporary South Asian Muslims. I closely read Thānvī’s texts and situate them within two frameworks: the history of Indo-Muslim thought and the socio-political history of colonial India. Thānvī’s hundreds of published treatises and sermons, continued citation within South Asian Islam, and widespread ṣūfī fellowship make him one of the most compelling case studies for analyzing some of the key thematic concerns of Muslim orthodoxy, such as religious knowledge, self-discipline, sublimation of desire, regulation of gender, and communalist politics. My analyses demonstrate how orthodox scholars proliferated their theological, legal, and mystical teachings in order to make tradition relevant and authoritative in the public and private lives of many South Asian Muslims. Orthodox Islam not only survived colonial modernity, but also thrived in its ideological and social contexts.

For my mother and father,
Nusrat and Altaf Mian

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Acknowledgements

The subject of this study, Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, played a crucial role in my formative religious experiences. My intellectual romance with Thānvī was a gripping, solitary exposure to grace and tradition. The experience now enables me to appreciate Flannery O’Connor’s words of wisdom: “Our age not only does not have a very sharp eye for the almost imperceptible intrusions of grace, it no longer has much feeling for the nature of the violences which precede and follow them.” For better or for worse, I journeyed away from Thānvī. Journeying away, however, does not mean forgetting or disavowing. I have slowly learned to remember him and to avow him in creative and critical ways. The journey continues...and my paranoid and reparative modes of engagement with the Islamic tradition have become indebted to other ideological constructs and figures—other scenes of meaning and pleasure. Freud and Foucault, I must confess, have become indispensable resources for my thinking. Over the past decade or so, I have immersed myself in the critical study of religion, psychoanalysis, continental philosophy, women’s studies, and queer theory. I am grateful to my mentor and dissertation supervisor, Professor Ebrahim Moosa, for his patience with me as I ventured into disciplinary domains beyond religious studies. Professor Moosa is an exemplary teacher and a scholar extraordinaire (always cutting-edge, always already there). I especially thank him for the countless hours he spent with me reading classical Arabic texts. I also enjoyed our chapter meetings, which enriched me with valuable resources and newfound inspiration (*āp ke andāz-i karam ke liye āp kā shukriya*).

I also benefited from studying with Professor Kalman P. Bland. His tutelage and wisdom transported me to the philosophical worlds of Philo, Maimonides, Ibn Rushd,

Spinoza, and Kant. Professor Bland read my work with care and placed critical and historical questions on the horizon of my thinking. *Thank you, Dr. Bland!* I am also grateful to Professor Bruce B. Lawrence for generously sharing with me gems from his wide-ranging erudition. Professor Robyn Wiegman brought her razor-sharp insights to my project and asked me compelling meta-critical questions (*thank you, robyn, for generously giving me your time, for teaching me feminist theory and queer theory, and for including me in trips to asheville, manchester, and norway*). My thanks also go to Professor Laura Lieber, who gently taught me parts of the Talmud and provided incredibly helpful feedback on chapter drafts. I am grateful to Professor Carl Ernst for answering my questions with resourceful replies. For her encouraging presence, I thank Professor Leela Prasad.

My other teachers all taught me valuable lessons. My heartfelt thanks go to Thomas Maloney, Susan M. Ryan, Matthew Biberman, Glynis Ridley, Bronwyn Williams, John McLeod, Toril Moi, Elizabeth Grosz, Valentin Mudimbe, Kenneth Surin, Antonio Viego, Ranjana Khanna, Michael Gillespie, Mona Hassan, Mohsen Kadivar, miriam cooke, Shaykh Salah Abu'l-Haj, and Muhammad Habib. The following professors patiently listened to me and enlightened me with insight: Marcia Hermansen, Rey Chow, Katherine Ewing, Frances Hasso, Sumathi Ramaswamy, Ara Wilson, and Margrit Pernau. I thank SherAli Tareen and Zahid Chaudhary for involving me in enriching conference panels.

The following colleagues and friends also shared their brilliance with me: Zaid Adhami, Amey Victoria Adkins, Torang Asadi, Hunter Bandy, Fahad Bishara, Yoknyam Dabale, Tamara Extian-Babiuk, Daanish Faruqi, Emanuel Fiano, Azeen Khan, Nadia Inji

Khan, Sohaib Khan, Sam Kigar, Jennifer Kryszak, Carolyn Laubender, Julia Lillis, David Liu, Alex McKinley, Youshaa Patel, Martin Repinecz, Matt Siemer, Mashal Saif, Kenan Tekin, Brett Wilson, Michelle Wolff, Saadia Yacoob, and Louis Yako.

No words can capture my indebtedness to Sidra Mian whose love and levity radiate my everyday existence. She is the lighthouse to which I constantly sail. My last year at Duke has been especially exciting because of the birth of our son, Muhammad Tayyib Mian. I thank my caring and loving siblings: Sadia, Alia, and Usman. Nothing in my life would have seen the light of day without the encouragement and love of my parents, Nusrat and Altaf Mian. They taught me the most important lessons about survival. I dedicate this document to *ammī jān* and *abū jān*.

Introduction: Behind the Scenes of Muslim Orthodoxy in Colonial India

In September 1914, Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī (1863-1943), a colonial Indian Muslim theologian, narrated this dream to his disciples: “I once envisioned Queen Victoria in my sleep during her lifetime. She was sitting in a rather strange transportation device that was neither a horse-drawn carriage nor a steam locomotive. Her ride moved by itself!”¹ The Muslim sage depicted the English monarch and symbol par excellence of imperial Britain traveling in an automobile, associating her image with technological advancement. Thānvī reported that he conversed with the empress, who approved of Islam but was critical of the Prophet Muḥammad: “The Queen expressed that Islam was a true religion, but she could not understand why the Prophet Muḥammad was disposed to humor and jokes. The Queen was offended by jest and playfulness. She considered these character traits to be opposed to reason and culture alike. In this dream, the Queen asked me, ‘How can joking befit a prophet?’” Thānvī assuaged her concerns: “I replied to Her Majesty that because the Prophet Muḥammad embodied moral perfection, it was important for him to empathize with his associates in an affectionate manner, especially since they could have been intimidated by his awe-inspiring presence. The Prophet’s primary mission consisted of teaching moral education. In order to execute this calling, he had to cultivate the capacity to relate to others. His jokes and levity therefore made it possible for people to learn from him without any apprehensions.”² In his report of the dream, Thānvī insisted that Victoria “really admired this explanation and said, ‘I have no

¹ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat* (Multan: Idāra-yi Ta’līfāt-i Ashrafiyya, n.d.), 29:114. All translations of primary Arabic and Urdu texts, including all of Thānvī’s works, are mine.

² Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 29:114.

objections to Islam.”³

This fascinating dream-text helps us to appreciate the significance of European colonialism and its civilizing mission for making sense of the intellectual context of Indo-Muslim thought and practice in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The dream reveals how colonized subjects such as Thānvī did not imagine themselves to be powerless, but instead wielded enough authority, imaginary or otherwise, to converse directly with the British monarch. The narration of this dream enabled Thānvī to invoke an imagined world where colonial power differentials did not hinder candid communication and interfaith dialogue between Her Majesty and one of her subjects.⁴

This dream-text is a representation of the psychic life of an orthodox theologian, disclosing the sorts of anxieties felt by Muslims as they encountered British perceptions of Islam. Thānvī’s humanization of the Prophet’s image was ultimately a defense of his own image as an heir of prophetic wisdom. Moreover, the colonial theologian narrated this dream for didactic purposes. He was essentially teaching his disciples something about survival: one must generate interpretations of the tradition that avow Muslim dignity and humanity in a social and political context where Muslims were depicted as

³ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 29:114. Thānvī’s favourable depiction of Victoria could have been based on reports about the Queen’s appreciation of Hindi and Urdu, as well as her interest in acquiring basic knowledge about Islam. The recent discovery of diaries kept by her personal Muslim servant, Abdul Karim, sheds light on her Indophilic and Islamophilic tendencies. See Alastair Lawson, “Queen Victoria and Abdul: Diaries Reveal Secrets.” *BBC News*. 13 March 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12670110> Accessed 22 September 2013.

⁴ In thinking about how to interpret this dream-text, these words of Yeats have crossed my mind: “I have spread my dreams under your feet; Tread softly because you tread on my dreams” (“He Wishes for the Clothes of Heaven”). The historian of religion W. C. Smith appropriates these words to express something similar about the use of compassion and empathy in the academic study of religion: “The subject-matter of our study...is not so abject or supine, not to be so paced upon by a would-be surveyor. It has been said that one must tread softly here, for one is treading on men’s dreams” (Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A Revolutionary Approach to the Great Religious Traditions* [London: SPCK, 1978], 5). We may also think of the following words of the sociologist of religion, Robert Bellah: “Dreams...do not operate in standard time and space: they can bring together persons from different times and places in a single interaction” (*Religion in Human Evolution*, 2).

regressive and uncivilized.⁵ For his part, Thānvī offered Her Majesty a fresh interpretation of Muḥammad’s legacy and thereby won her approval and recognition.

Thānvī’s concerns about the Muslim self belonged to larger debates about Muslim subjectivity and sociality in colonial India. These debates were informed by seismic shifts within modern religious experience, most notably the shift from collective identification to privatized identity. Modern religion consisted of faith and conscience, two subjective qualities that moderns cultivated from their direct study of scripture. Scholars of South Asian Islam have argued that Muslim reform and revival movements appropriated the privatization of religious experience by emphasizing individual responsibility and independent engagement with tradition. With the ascendancy of British rule and the dissolution of Muslim sovereignty, South Asian Muslim theologians took “an inward turn.”⁶

I take seriously the scholarly diagnosis about the privatization of religion in colonial South Asian Islam. In order to understand modern/colonial Islam, I analyze the themes of religious knowledge, self-discipline, sublimation of passion, regulation of

⁵ Consider, for example, the Irish-English author Sir William Howard Russell’s journalistic coverage of the tumultuous years of the Indian Revolt of 1857-58 for *The Times*: “The fact is, that the Mahomedan element in India is that which causes us most trouble and provokes the largest share of our hostility. Our missionaries make no progress in the Mussulman districts. Our religious and educational movements are watched by the Moulvies and fanatics with the greatest suspicion” (William Howard Russell, *My Diary in India in the Year 1858-9* [London: Routledge, Warne, and Routledge, 1860], 2:73-74). For an analysis of how colonial discourse depicted South Asian Muslims, see Alex Padamsee, *Representations of Indian Muslims in British Colonial Discourse* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁶ See, for example, Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). As Metcalf claims, “In this period the ‘ulama’ chose a strategy of turning within, eschewing for the time all concern with the organization of the state and relations with other communities. Their sole concern was to preserve the religious heritage” (Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 11). Francis Robinson has specifically used the expression, “the inward turn,” to describe the changes in Muslim self-perception brought about by the failure of the Revolt of 1857: “The ground was thus prepared for the ‘inward turn’; the self’s inner landscape increasingly lay open for exploration” (“The British Empire and Muslim Identity in South Asia.” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 8 [1998], 288).

gender, and communal identity. My analysis elaborates the form and content of interiorized Muslim subjectivity in colonial India. At the same time, I unravel the powerful ways in which figurations of the political—*the master-disciple relationship, respectable women, colonial courts, communal formations, and national identities*—haunted the privatized Muslim self of colonial South Asian Islam. “The inward turn” argument, I contend, yields only a single portal into understanding the complex scenes of Muslim subjectivity and sociality in colonial India. My dissertation contributes to existing scholarship by demonstrating how Muslim theologians deployed privatized religion as a strategy for generating counter-collectivities and alternative social imaginaries in the context of colonial modernity. This becomes especially explicit, I believe, through a detailed study of the formation of Muslim *orthodoxy* in colonial India.

What do I mean by Muslim orthodoxy?⁷ Let me acknowledge at the outset that interpretations of Islam and practices of Muslims were incredibly diverse in colonial India. Indo-Muslim intellectuals inhabited a wide-ranging spectrum of doctrinal and theological orientations, mystical affiliations, and political postures. Some Muslim scholars belonged to particular schools of thought, while others straddled multiple

⁷ Several scholars of Islam and historians of religion criticize the use of the term, “orthodoxy,” with reference to non-Catholic or non-Greek Orthodox religious communities. Their basic contention is that orthodoxy is the name of the Church’s formal *dogma*. The concept, therefore, makes sense in religious contexts where ecclesiastical authority determines doctrinal correctness. Where there is no Church, orthodoxy as such cannot exist (see Brett Wilson, “The Failure of Nomenclature: The Concept of ‘Orthodoxy’ in the Study of Islam.” *Comparative Islamic Studies* 3.2 [2007]: 169-194). In my view, however, the meaning produced by “Muslim orthodoxy” is evocative not of official Church dogma, but of discursive and institutional processes in Islamdom resonant with Church orthodoxy. We could say that orthodoxy in general implies a *procedural and discursive exclusionary process* by which certain beliefs are staged as authoritative, authentic, and normative. This process is not restricted to Christian ecclesiastical institutions. In fact, such processes of procedural exclusion characterize many religious traditions with regulating discourses and institutions of their own. The textual evidence of South Asian intra-Muslim debates about authoritative doctrine make it possible for us to use “orthodoxy” in order to refer to this process of staging authority. Moreover, I doubt that the adjectival modification of orthodoxy by “Muslim” will continue to signify formal Church dogma.

discursive traditions and intellectual circles. I therefore do not employ “Muslim orthodoxy” as shorthand for the traditionally trained specialists of sacred law and theology (*‘ulamā’*). Muslim orthodoxy names a constellation of theologians and jurists who actively debated doctrine, ritual, and custom within the registers of traditionalist authority (*taqlīd*) and prophetic normativity (*sunna*). Undoubtedly, the most vitriolic debates about belief and practice transpired between two groups of colonial theologians: the Deobandīs and the Barelvīs. The Deobandī and Barelvī Schools represented two competing narratives and institutions of Muslim orthodoxy, as scholars associated with both groups claimed their doctrinal interpretations to be normative, authoritative, and authentic.⁸

The phrase, “Muslim orthodoxy in colonial India,” captures the Deobandī and Barelvī staging of authoritative and normative expressions of religious belief and practice. This particular staging marginalized Indian Shī‘ism and Muslim modernism, as well as numerous other Muslim communities, such as the Aḥmadiyya. This staging involved multiple procedural maneuvers, ranging from anathematization and condemnation of heterodoxy to elaboration of authentic doctrines and sound salvation practices. Deobandī and Barelvī contestations of orthodoxy unfolded in a specific historical context that was beset with collective melancholia. This psychic formation

⁸ Deobandī and Barelvī scholars vied with each other in order to claim the orthodox position. For practical purposes, I use the expression, “Muslim orthodoxy in colonial India,” to refer to the Deobandī-Barelvī theological and legal discursive complex. The classic and pioneering studies of the Deoband and Barelvī schools of thought are, respectively: Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi and his Movement, 1870-1920* (Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Studies on Deobandī and Barelvī scholars include: M. Anwarul Haq, *The Faith Movement of Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972); Usha Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi: In the Path of the Prophet* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005); Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Ashraf ‘Ali Thanawi: Islam in Modern South Asia* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008).

powerfully shaped the reactionary and defensive tone of orthodox interpretations and discourses.

What accounted for this melancholic attachment to tradition? Melancholia takes root in the context of personal or political loss and fragmentation. Indo-Muslim orthodox theologians were affected by the demise of South Asian Muslim sovereignty, especially the bloodshed of the failed 1857 skirmishes with colonial forces. Many North Indian Muslims felt this political loss at personal levels as well. These feelings of loss, however, had been developing since the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the East India Company had consolidated its control of North India. As Farhan Ahmad Nizami notes, “An analysis of the literary texts of the period also gives one an impression that the Muslim mind was obsessed with a ‘fear’ and saw the traditional cultural system and its sources of patronage disappearing.”⁹ In the absence of state patronage, traditionalist Muslims struggled to garner economic and social resources needed for preserving their intellectual communities.¹⁰ Their melancholic attachment to tradition was linked to perceptions of losing the world of traditional values.

In this scenario, orthodox scholars directly turned their attention to reviving the religious life of Indian Muslims. They employed several strategies of survival and tactics

⁹ Farhan Ahmad Nizami, “Madrasahs, Scholars, and Saints: Muslim Response to the British Presence in Delhi and the Upper Doab, 1803-1857.” Oxford University. Ph.D. Dissertation. 1983, 52.

¹⁰ The Revolt of 1857 can be historically situated within social processes that had already begun in the eighteenth century. As C.A. Bayly has argued, the Revolt of 1857 was only the exaggerated form of social strife that had characterized much of Indian society since the preceding century or so. See especially Bayly’s chapter titled, “Rebellion and Reconstruction,” in *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Barbara D. Metcalf’s following explanation helps to explain the historical importance of the Revolt of 1857: “The consolidation of British control over India was dramatically challenged in 1857 when a military rebellion was joined by civil disorder in a series of uprisings that spread across the north. Brutally and ruthlessly suppressed, it left no doubt as to the power of the British. The decades that followed, with the Company abolished and the Queen proclaimed Empress, were the height of imperial rule, of belief in the British mission, of expansion of the bureaucracy and of British institutions” (Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 10-11).

of thriving, including prolific print culture, public debates and sermons, and a close-knit network of seminaries. Scholars of South Asian Islam have studied these sociological strategies. This dissertation argues that orthodox scholars and ṣūfīs employed an extensive array of additional strategies of survival: symbolic strategies (such as “religious knowledge”), ontological strategies (such as self-discipline), psychic strategies (such as sublimation), aesthetic strategies (such as “heavenly ornaments”), hermeneutical strategies (such as “legal amalgamation”), and political strategies (such as communalism). Orthodox theologians consciously deliberated some of these strategies, while others were unconsciously present in their everyday discursive activities. These strategies were effective for steering communal resources toward the proliferation of traditional lifestyles. Thanks to these theologians, the discourse on the transcendental penetrated the immanent world of ordinary Muslims. While the content of their theological message was not always original, *how* colonial theologians appropriated and intensified the Islamic discursive tradition was novel in the history of South Asian Islam.

Concepts and Methods

The above-mentioned strategies and tactics enabled orthodox scholars to survive colonial modernity. Survival names those ingenious institutions, discursive diffusions, and subjective capacities that individuals and communities cultivate and deploy in order to fashion their worlds in hard times. The custodians of the Islamic tradition engage in two modes of survival: external and internal. They must survive external threats to the tradition, but they must also survive tradition’s self-destructive elements.

Tradition, as I understand it, is an autoimmune discursive and experiential system of belonging. For those who belong to it, tradition is at once productive and destructive.

Tradition contains both the impulse toward death—the mystical desire to become one with transcendence—and the impulse toward life—the moral-juridical desire to cultivate a livable world. Belonging to the Islamic tradition implies inhabiting the tensions between transcendence and immanence. The mystical and legal dimensions of Islam embrace the pleasure principle and the death drive in different ways, from mystical ultra-transcendence to legal ultra-immanence. Tradition is therefore autoimmune and mitigates these tense tendencies. Let me put this argument in mythic-historical terms.

The primal ground of mystical experience in Islam was God’s self-disclosure to Muḥammad, an encounter with transcendence so powerful that it had to be mediated by the angel Gabriel. This mediated encounter with transcendence made Muḥammad tremble. He ran back from his mountaintop sanctuary to his wife Khadīja, a businesswoman comfortably situated within the immanent structures of life. Seeking the feminine touch, Muḥammad exclaimed: “Cover me up, cover me up! I fear for my life.”¹¹ This primal myth structures the content, if not the form, of mystical experience in Islam. It teaches that an encounter with the unknown is both ineffable and affective, provoking fear and trembling. In this way, mystical experience is extraordinary. It tears apart discursive knowledge and entrenched habits, making ordinary life impossible. That is why Muḥammad went back to worldly life and took refuge in the intimacy of the human touch.

Muḥammad disciplined worldly life by means of norms and prohibitions that regulated the pleasure principle and the death drive. He received other forms of revelation that guided the everyday life of the community. These immanent regulations gave a

¹¹ My reconstruction is based on the third *ḥadīth* of Bukhārī’s *Saḥīḥ*.

communal content to the experience of the transcendent. The revelation of the divine norms (*sharī'a*) presupposed a God who was found in private and public cultic practices and intersubjective transactions. However, the divine norms had to be ascertained from revelation and were therefore open to interpretation. The early Muslims translated the *sharī'a* into everyday ethical embodiment (a tradition that later became known as *fiqh*). At times, however, this translation lost sight of the transcendental ethos. Formal sacred law alone abolished the heartfelt connection with the divine.

The tension between the transcendental and the immanent—between the mystical and the legal—was a symptom of tradition's autoimmunity. While Muslim traditionalists in various epochs and locales were diverse in terms of their doctrinal, ritual, and communal orientations, they all struggled with tradition itself (and not only with “corrupting societies” or “changing times”). Tradition created a set of productive tensions in the private and public lives of its adherents. These tensions oscillated between dialectics such as desire and sublimation, femininity and masculinity, equality and difference. These tensions gave an affective and psychic dimension to tradition's discursive institutions and practices. It is with this autoimmune notion of tradition that I approach the formation of Muslim orthodoxy in colonial India.

In colonial India, the tension between the mystical and the legal appeared in the conceptual registers of religious knowledge, embodied piety, doctrinal correctness, self-discipline, sublimation of eros, respectable gender performance, legal authoritarianism, and communal identity. These ideas and ideals served dual purposes: they powerfully generated pious subjectivities and furnished emergent Muslim publics with vigorous ideological content. By inhabiting these tensions, Muslim theologians in colonial South

Asia survived both modernity and tradition.

I approach orthodox Muslim subjectivity and sociality in colonial India from a phenomenological perspective: I study textual representations of religious experience, lived reality, psychic formations, gender performance, and collective aspirations. Fortunately, the textual universe of South Asian Muslim orthodoxy is incredibly expansive and full of phenomenological representations, especially as documented in scholars' and *ṣūfīs*' recorded conversations (*malfūzāt*) and correspondence (*maktūbāt*). This colossal textual corpus helps to identify the concrete methods used by orthodox scholars for preserving their ideas, symbols, rituals, and institutions. This textual universe also contains roadmaps for tracing the alternative social imaginaries and political visions advanced by orthodox scholars. We find ample evidence to suggest that orthodoxy's strategies of survival engendered a subcultural world that was marked by resistance and reaction to the dominant political and social order of colonial modernity.¹²

Moreover, orthodox scholars, such as Thānvī, inhabited contradictory positions. I offer two illustrative examples here (each chapter will provide more examples of these contradictory positions). First, orthodox scholars approached the category of knowledge (*ʿilm*) as both “knowledge of the world” and “knowledge of salvation practices.” At a deeper level, however, they approached knowledge as an episteme (a body of signifiers), but also as mystical epistemology (encountering the unknowable). Second, orthodox

¹² To say that Muslim orthodoxy existed as a subaltern world or a minor culture does not necessarily imply that its agents were involved in peasant insurgency. Rather, I use subalternity in the original Gramscian sense, in which it refers to the appropriation of hegemonic concepts and institutions by marginalized persons or groups. Orthodox theologians such as Thānvī did not view their cultural or social life to be minor or marginal. British colonialism for them was a minor exception to North India's Muslim sovereignty. Many orthodox theologians insisted that India was still “the abode of Islam” (*dār al-islām*) despite the overbearing presence of British power. Therefore, the orthodoxy represented by theologians such as Thānvī was only subaltern or marginal when viewed from the vantage point of the colonial political and social order.

scholars were divided in terms of gender equality and gender segregation. On the one hand, they answered colonialist objections to the Muslim treatment of women by insisting that the Qur'ān taught spiritual equality between men and women. On the other hand, however, they upheld patriarchal interpretations of the Muslim scripture that enforced gender inequalities. These contradictions or tensions, I propose, were symptomatic of Muslim orthodoxy's internal splits.

These sorts of internal tensions mark the intellectual and psychic life of any individual who has perceived and experienced loss at a fundamental level of everyday existence. As discussed above, the loss of Muslim sovereignty in South Asia was a tremendous political and symbolic experience, which Muslim theologians personalized in various ways, ranging from the “inward” religion of the ascetic to the worldly religion of the political activist. The history of Muslim thought and practice in colonial modernity writ large provides numerous examples of the splitting of Muslim intellectual and social interests in unprecedented ways. Trauma, after all, generates a split in the individual ego, which struggles between the image of a lost ideal and its newfound reality. While an analysis of the individual ego does not warrant a perfect analogy with society, it nonetheless helps us understand the psychic dynamics of social processes.¹³

In his 1938 essay, “Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence,” Sigmund Freud asserted that a defensive reaction to conflict and pressure was most likely

¹³ Sigmund Freud theorized the relationship between individual psychology and mass psychology: “In the mental life of the individual, the other comes very regularly into consideration as model, object, aid and antagonist; at the same time, therefore, and from the outset, the psychology of the individual is also social psychology in this extended but wholly justified sense” (Sigmund Freud, *Mass Psychology and Other Writings*, trans. J. A. Underwood [London: Penguin Books, 2004], 17). For theoretical explorations of the analytical utility of psychoanalysis for understanding political and social processes, see Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

symptomatic of “a rift in the ego which never heals but which increases as time goes on.”¹⁴ It seems worthwhile to consider how people identifying with past ideals become reactionary and defensive when their ideals are threatened by contestation or force. Defense is not necessarily good or bad; it is a psychic movement that can often entail “artful” tactics, explained Freud.¹⁵ The displacements enacted by defense are worthy of close reading and careful examination. Orthodox Muslim theologians in colonial India coped with changing socio-political realities by inhabiting alternative ways of being, knowing, and doing.¹⁶ These alternative ways enabled them to reformulate, and to some extent manufacture, religious concepts and practices that were at once reflective of their nascent marginalized status in British India *and* assertive of their past imperial and sovereign political aspirations.

Orthodox scholars were incredibly successful in establishing educational institutions and leading reform movements in colonial India. They wielded the modern technologies of steam and print in order to widely disseminate their interpretations of religion. It is quite misinformed to assume that colonial modernity created adverse conditions for them; instead, colonial power generated fields of signification and planes of social action wherein actors representing various religious communities intensified

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, “Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence.” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Volume 23: 1937-1939 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964): 271-278. For Freud, the splitting of the ego occurs precisely because there are two simultaneous demands on it: the instinctual demand of self-satisfaction and the social demand of prohibition. Freud theorizes that the psyche acts in an “artful” manner by conciliating these contradictory demands.

¹⁵ Freud, “Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence,” 277.

¹⁶ This double response has been noted by Kenneth W. Jones as well: “As a group the ‘*ulama*’ saw little reason for adapting their own ideas to English culture, although they could not ignore British political-military power” (*Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990], 57-8).

tradition.¹⁷ In other words, colonialism was a theater of violence *and* viability—restraint and agency—for the colonized. The colonial logic of secularism was advantageous for orthodox actors, for it identified large areas of everyday life and social practice to be outside the imagined and actual control of the state. Similar to their Hindu counterparts, Muslim traditionalists were among the major engineers and managers of social spaces beyond officialdom. While a number of other non-state actors participated in colonial India’s civic society, Hindu and Muslim traditionalists were at the forefront of ordering and politicizing quotidian concerns and social realities. It is in this context that we can understand the surviving and the ultimate thriving of colonial South Asian Muslim orthodoxy.

As mentioned above, orthodox Muslim theologians in colonial India authored a massive published and archived body of work in various genres and multiple languages. This body of work does not always offer its readers systematic accounts of Muslim theology, mysticism, and legalism. Fragments of doctrinal and legal teaching are interspersed between diverse genres: legal responsa (*fatāwā*), recorded conversations (*malḥūzāt*), collected sermons (*khutbāt*), among others. While I pay attention to context, my study primarily concerns these species of texts and the concepts they elaborate.

I organize my analysis of Muslim orthodoxy around the colossal oeuvre of a major Muslim scholar, namely, Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī. I show how certain recurring concepts in Thānvī’s body of work were at once rooted in Islamic textual traditions and

¹⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru anticipated this point when he wrote, “British rule also helped religious conservatism. This sounds strange, for the British claimed to profess Christianity, and yet their coming made Hinduism and Islam in India more rigid. To some extent this reaction was natural, as foreign invasion tends to make the religions and culture of the country protect themselves by rigidity” (*Glimpses of World History*, 431).

wired into the broader disciplining impulses of colonial modernity. In order to closely examine the discursive formations of Muslim orthodoxy in colonial India, I take Thānvī as a case study.¹⁸ My case study sheds light on the paradoxical conceptual overlaps between the governing logics of colonial rule and those of Muslim orthodoxy. Similar to the colonial discourses with which orthodox theologians competed, their epistemic intensification of past traditions penetrated the embodied and affective dimensions of the individual and collective Muslim subject. In order to understand these connections between colonial discourse and local traditions, I examine closely what Thānvī said about religion and its knowledge, disciplined self-fashioning, erotic tendencies, gender and domesticity, women's marital rights, and political theology.

Scenes of Survival: Chapter Outline

There is an entire structure in place before actors engage in their dramatic lives: plays and playwrights, storylines and popular themes, theaters and auditoriums, paraphernalia and costumes, acting lessons and academies, acting instructors and students, and most of all: the human desire to stage and to spectate scenes. The following chapters analyze particular stagings of Muslim orthodoxy in colonial India. While Thānvī is our lead character, we will also pay attention to other *dramatis personae*. Each chapter stages a conceptual tension that Thānvī resolved by means of a strategy. For example, he resolved the tension between passion and reason by means of self-discipline. The

¹⁸ By discursive formation, I allude to the historical development of a body of knowledge, a discourse, or a discipline. I therefore analyze discourses that were constructed and employed to define Muslim personal and communal identities in British India. The authors of these discourses were known as "scholars" or '*ulamā*', who received formal training in classical and medieval Arabic and Persian texts about Muslim theology and Qur'ānic exegesis, Greek philosophy, grammar and poetics, sacred law, legal theory, and the standard books of the Prophet Muḥammad's reports or traditions. The '*ulamā*' studied these texts in seminary-type institutions known as *madrasas*. For an excellent study of South Asian *madrasas*, see Ebrahim Moosa, *What is a Madrasa?* (Chapel Hill, NC.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

chapters put together cover the gamut between the private and the public, for I start with Thānvī's subjectivity and conclude with Thānvī's political theology.

Taken together, the themes of lived thought, knowledge, subjectivity, embodiment, sexuality, gender, and political theology illustrate the major everyday concerns of orthodox scholars. In "The Performance of Life and Thought," I provide a brief intellectual biography of Thānvī, with special attention to the biographical details that explain his teaching on the aforementioned themes and the various literary genres that document this teaching. In this chapter, I explain how his dual training in the traditional sciences (*manqūlāt*) and the rational sciences (*ma'qūlāt*), coupled with his training in mysticism, embedded him within the dialectics of mysticism and legalism, revelation and reason, tradition and modernity, and autonomy and heteronomy.

Orthodox scholars profusely spoke of "knowledge of religion" (*'ilm-i dīn*), which was the master concept of Muslim orthodoxy in colonial India. They claimed that *'ilm-i dīn* alone authorized sound subjectivity and authentic embodiment. Their seminaries and prolific discursive activity aimed to intensify *'ilm-i dīn*. I analyze Thānvī's teaching on *'ilm-i dīn* in the chapter titled, "The Production of Knowledge: Moral Responsibility and Gnostic Insight." This chapter furnishes close readings of Thānvī's ideas about the significance of *religious* knowledge. I demonstrate how Thānvī was a serious reader of the Islamic scholarly tradition. He studied the traditional canon to generate projects of self-making and world-building. Knowledge, for Thānvī, was split between discursive learning and mystical insight. He resolved this tension by fusing moral responsibility (as outlined in traditional bodies of knowledge) into gnostic insight (as experienced by Muslim mystics).

The next chapter, “The Script of Subjectivity: The Passionate Self and Rational Discipline,” discusses Thānvī’s theological and mystical reflections on human nature and the authority of revelation, reason, and passion. Thānvī argued that ideal selfhood consisted of passionate and rational observation of the revealed norms. For him, the self was dominated by passion—he referred to the human being as “the passionate animal”—and thus had to be disciplined by reason. Thānvī used the strategy of rational self-discipline to counter the colonialist depiction of Muslims as prone to passion. This strategy not only appealed to orthodox disciples, but even to some Muslim modernists, such as the Urdu journalist and Qur’ān commentator ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī (1892-1977). Daryābādī recorded his sympathetic observations of Thānvī in an Urdu memoir titled, *Ḥakīm al-ummat (The Sage of the Community)*. My close reading of this understudied text demonstrates how Thānvī deployed rationality and discipline to construct the ideal Muslim subject. Thānvī embodied two forms of discipline, namely asceticism and admonition, in order to sublimate affects such as passion and erotic love.

The next chapter, “The Scene of Sublimation: Sensuality and Divinity,” analyzes how orthodox scholars managed the various species of desire and how they sublimated erotic passion into the service of the moral law. Thānvī and like-minded theologians were troubled by affective excess, especially homoerotic desire. Thānvī’s teaching on the sublimation of desire is especially visible in his correspondence with his disciples. My examination of this correspondence yields that several of Thānvī’s disciples were struggling with extramarital heterosexual or homoerotic desire. I analyze how Thānvī guided them to repress this desire and to channel it toward the actualization of higher moral ideals. The orthodox disavowal of homoerotic desire, I argue, was symptomatic of

gender segregation.

The following two chapters address Thānvī's teaching on gender by examining his views on domesticity and women's legal agency. In "The Drama of Domesticity: Ornamental Femininity and Essential Masculinity," I analyze Thānvī's legal compendium, *Bihishtī zewar* (*Heavenly Ornaments*), a hugely popular book he authored exclusively for a female readership. I first situate Thānvī's compendium within its socio-political context in order to demonstrate how the colonial state's relegation of domestic life to local clergy enabled male theologians such as Thānvī to regulate Muslim women's everyday lives. Second, I analyze Thānvī's views on femininity and masculinity, demonstrating how he analogized the former to the ornamental and the latter to the essential. I argue that such gender inequality in Muslim orthodoxy was an effect of authoritarianism. By the 1930s, Thānvī was not only authoring advice literature for a female readership, but was also writing legal tracts that shaped Muslim women's social agency. In "The Theater of Legalism: Equality and Difference," I sketch the history of Thānvī's legal writings that enabled him to intervene in the juridical structures of the colonial state. Orthodox scholars were therefore not cloistered away in privatized religion, but engaged in socio-political processes such as colonial legislation.

Thānvī and other orthodox figures actively debated the parameters of their agency within the social and political context of colonial India. In this dissertation's last chapter, "The Spectacle of Communal Politics: Separatism and Nationalism," I contextualize Thānvī's political perspectives in order to illustrate his theology of separatism and communalism. Thānvī's identity-based politics differed from the political perspectives of other orthodox scholars who proposed a theology of pluralism and nationalism. This

chapter therefore situates Thānvī's theological conservatism within the broader politics of Muslim separatism and Indian nationalism.

In the conclusion, I theorize the mode of power the enabled orthodox theologians to deploy sociological, symbolic, subjective, psychic, hermeneutical, and political strategies of survival and tactics of thriving. I argue that theologians such as Thānvī embodied saintly and juridical authority to generate an alternative political imaginary that was at once grounded in Muslim traditions and responsive to colonial governmentality. I also highlight the need for comparing Muslim orthodoxy to other iterations of religious orthodoxy in colonial modernity.

Chapter 1. The Performance of Life and Thought: A Brief Biography of Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī

Life and thought are inseparable. The biological infiltrates the biographical and there is always traffic between the ontic and the ontological. The borderline between the subject and representations of subjectivity is blurry. Keeping these points in mind, I invoke “life and thought” to mean something like *lived thought* or *thinking life*. Before I address the categories of thought that animated the life of Muslim orthodoxy in colonial South Asia, a brief intellectual biography of my case study is in order. This chapter furnishes this biography, portraying Thānvī as a major Muslim theologian, ṣūfī master, jurist, orator, and social reformer of colonial India. This chapter’s last section will also provide a summation of Thānvī’s contributions to the major genres of Indo-Muslim religious literature.

Thānvī’s disciples have authored voluminous biographical tomes on the ṣūfī master’s life and teaching.¹ This hagiographical body of writings is a monument to Thānvī’s saint-like image and memory among his followers. A recent Arabic biographical study of Thānvī is equally embellished with reverence and praise, lauding him as “the sage of the Muslim community and the spiritual guide of contemporary Indian Muslim scholars.”² The epithet, “the sage of the Muslim community” (*ḥakīm al-*

¹ The chief sources for Thānvī’s biography are: ‘Azīz al-Ḥasan Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*. 4 vols. (Multan: Idāra-yi Ta’līfāt-i Ashrafiyya, 1995); ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān, *Sīrat-i Ashraf*. 2 vols. (Multan: Idāra-yi Ta’līfāt-i Ashrafiyya, 1996); Mas’ūd Aḥsan ‘Alawī, *Ma’āsir-i Ḥakīm al-ummat* (Lahore: Idāra-yi Islāmiyyat, 1986); Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥayy ‘Ārifī, “Ḥakīm al-ummat Ḥazrat Thānvī ke ḥālāt wa maṣrūfiyāt-i zindagī.” In *Chālīs barey musulmān*, ed. Muḥammad Akbar Shāh Bukhārī (Karachi: Idārat al-Qur’ān, 2001): 1:225-244; Ghulām Muḥammad, *Ḥayāt-i Ashraf* (Karachi: Maktaba-yi Thānvī, n.d.).

² Muḥammad Raḥmat Allāh al-Nadawī, *Ashraf ‘Alī al-Tahānawī: Ḥakīm al-umma wa shaykh-u mashā’ikh al-‘aṣr fī l-Hind* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2006).

ummat), reflected the prevalent practice of antonomasia in the Islamic scholarly and mystical traditions.³

There are several sympathetic accounts of Thānvī's thought, especially his psychological insight, in the English language.⁴ Critical scholarship on Thānvī includes Muhammad Qasim Zaman's indispensable biography, which places its subject within the broader world of modern South Asian Islam, Barbara D. Metcalf's partial translation of Thānvī's major legal compendium for Muslim women (*Bihishtī zewar*, literally, "Heavenly Ornaments," but translated as *Perfecting Women*), and several journal articles.⁵ Thānvī's most celebrated Urdu biography is a four-volume compendium titled *Ashraf al-sawānih*, a text initiated by 'Abd al-Ḥaqq and completed by 'Azīz al-Ḥasan

³ Mirzā Muḥammad Bēg of Delhi first used this epithet with reference to Thānvī (Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*, 1:10). According to Muftī Muḥammad Shafī', the Prophet Muḥammad's companion Abū Dardā was also called *ḥakīm al-umma* (Muḥammad Rāshid, *Ma'āsir-i Muftī-yi A'ẓam*, 15).

⁴ Ahmed Ali Khawaja, *Maulana Ashraf Ali Thānvī: His Views on Moral Philosophy and Tasawwuf* (Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2002); Mohammad Abdullah, *The Life and Teaching of Maulana Ashraf Ali Thānvī* (Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2002); Syed Azhar Ali Rizvi, *Muslim Tradition in Psychotherapy and Modern Trends* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1994).

⁵ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi: Islam in Modern South Asia* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008); Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990); Ahmad Saeed, "Quaid-i-Azam and Mawlānā Ashraf Ali Thānvī." *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 47.3 (1999): 23-28; Rizwan Malik, "Muslim Nationalism in India: Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi, Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani, and the Pakistan Movement." *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture* 18.2 (1997): 73-82; Shahid Ali Abbasi, "Rethinking in Islam: Ashraf 'Ali Thānawī on God and Man." *Islamic Culture* 74.1 (2000): 47-87; Shahid Ali Abbasi, "Rethinking in Islam: Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thānawī on Way and Way-Faring." *Islamic Culture* 75.3 (2001): 31-72; Usamah Yasin Ansari, "'Tandrusti deen ka kaam hai': Health as a Matter of Religion in Book 9 of Ashraf Ali Thānvī's *Bahishti Zewar*." *History of Religions* 52.1 (2012): 49-76; Usamah Yasin Ansari, "The Pious Self is a Jewel in Itself: Agency and Tradition in the Production of 'Shariatic Modernity'." *South Asia Research* 30.3 (2010): 275-298; Fuad S. Naeem, "Sufism and Revivalism in South Asia: Mawlānā Alī Thānvī of Deoband and Mawlānā Aḥmad Razā Khān of Bareilly and their Paradigms of Islamic Revivalism." *The Muslim World* 99 (July 2009): 435-451; Fareeha Khan, "Tafwīḍ al-Ṭalāq: Transferring the Right to Divorce to the Wife." *The Muslim World* 99 (July 2009): 502-520; Fareeha Khan, "Traditionalist Approaches to *Sharī'ah* Reform: Mawlana 'Ali Thanawi's Fatwa on Women's Right to Divorce." Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Michigan. 2008; Ali Altaf Mian and Nancy N. Potter. "Invoking Islamic Rights in British India: Mawlana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's *Huquq al-Islam*." *The Muslim World* 99 (April 2009): 312-334.

Ghawrī (1884-1944).⁶ Both authors were Thānvī's ṣūfī disciples. Thānvī read and approved of the first three volumes of *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ*.⁷ The last volume, *Khātimat al-sawāniḥ*, was published after the ṣūfī master's death in 1943. In form and content, *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ* resembled ṣūfī *tazkiras*, a genre of writing that deployed the master's "recorded conversations" (*malfūzāt*), anecdotal memories, and frequent citations from Arabic and Persian mystical poetry to reconstruct the master's lived reality.⁸ Ghawrī was an accomplished Urdu poet steeped in the literary masterpieces of Persian mysticism, from which he often drew parallels to reflect on Thānvī's life and teaching.⁹ I rely heavily on *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ* in the following biographical account of Thānvī.

The Formative Years

Fifteen years after the "Year of Revolutions" (1848) in Europe, six years after the Mutiny of 1857 in India, and in the same year that Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the abolishment of slavery in the United States, Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī was born in September 1863 (5 Rabī' al-Ākhir 1280 AH) in Thāna Bhawan (thus the name Thānvī), a small town located around 75 miles north of Delhi (in the United Provinces of colonial India).¹⁰ Thānvī's family claimed Arab ancestral roots, as was typical of many South Asian

⁶ On Ghawrī, see Aḥmad Sa'īd, *Zikr-i Majzūb: Tazkirah-yi Khawāja 'Azīz al-Ḥasan Majzūb Ghawrī* (Lahore: Maktaba-yi Iḥyā al-'ulūm al-sharqiyya, 1974).

⁷ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ*, 1:3.

⁸ The constant citation of poetry in *tazkira* volumes spoke to the limits of prose in portraying saints' lived realities. These poetic citations added an aesthetic element to the ethical and didactic content of the genre.

⁹ Ghawrī's poetic name (*takhalluṣ*) was *majzūb*. His poetry has been collected in a single volume: 'Azīz al-Ḥasan Ghawrī, *Kashkol-i Majzūb* (Multan: Idāra-yi Ta'līfāt-i Ashrafiyya, 2003).

¹⁰ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ*, 1:19. The town of Thana Bhawan is located eighteen miles northwest of the city of Muzaffarnagar. It is nearby the towns of Deoband, Kandhla, Jhanjhana, Gangoh, and Kirana, which are all renowned as homes to Muslim luminaries. During the Mughul period, the Muslim residents of Thana Bhawan called this town Muḥammadpūr, a name that did not win popularity among the town's non-Muslim inhabitants.

Muslim families that self-identified as *ashrāf* (“high-born”).¹¹ In Indo-Muslim culture, *ashrāf* communities were descendants of foreign Muslim settlers from the so-called “Islamic heartland” (Western Arabia, Iraq, Syria, and so on) or upper-caste Hindu converts to Islam.¹² Indian Muslims who did not claim foreign ancestry or local nobility were referred to as *ajlāf* (“low-born”). Thānvī approved of the social superiority of the “high-born” over the “low-born” throughout his sermons and recorded conversations.¹³ His maternal family, according to Ghawrī, descended from the fourth Caliph, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, while his paternal family traced its roots back to the second Caliph, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. In this way, commented Ghawrī, “Our beloved Mawlānā Thānvī inherited the gift of passion (*‘ishq*) from ‘Alī and the gift of rational capacity (*‘aql*) from ‘Umar.”¹⁴ Ghawrī portrayed Thānvī’s embodiment of the productive tension between passion and reason as a consequence of the master’s noble genealogy.

Thānvī’s intellectual formation in Muslim scholarly and ṣūfī traditions unfolded in three contexts of tutelage: his home in Thana Bhawan, the Deoband seminary, and several spiritual retreats, especially two in the Arabian city of Mecca where his ṣūfī master, Ḥājī Imdād Allāh al-Fārūqī (1817-1899), had taken refuge after the skirmishes of 1857.¹⁵ Thānvī’s personal piety, deep learning, and heartfelt spirituality were cultivated in these three enchanted spaces. These three buildings played an instrumental role in

¹¹ For a thorough account of *ashrāf* culture, see Margrit Pernau, *Ashraf Into Middle Class: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹² Pernau, *Ashraf Into Middle Class*, 57. See also, Imtiaz Ahmad, “The Ashraf-Ajlaf Dichotomy in Muslim Social Structures in India.” *Indian Economic-Social History Review* 3.3 (July 1966): 268-278.

¹³ I borrow “high-born” and “low-born” as translations of *ashrāf* and *ajlāf*, respectively, from Saurabh Dube, “Untouchables, Religions of.” *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2005): 14:9474-9478.

¹⁴ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*, 1:12.

¹⁵ I have followed Sayyid ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī’s *Nuzhat al-khawātir* with reference to the years of Ḥājī Imdād Allāh’s life. The *Encyclopaedia of Islam* entry on the latter reports 1815 as his year of birth.

constructing Thānvī's understanding of the world. Configurations of space give coherence to the representational frames of our knowledge and action.¹⁶

While late nineteenth-century North Indian Muslims of the United Provinces spoke Urdu at home, many upper middle-class families retained the knowledge of the Arabo-Persian literary tradition. Thānvī studied rudimentary Arabic and Persian texts in his hometown with Mawlānā Faṭḥ Muḥammad: “My early zeal for religion arose in the company of Mawlānā Faṭḥ Muḥammad, a very blessed personage, and a spiritual successor of Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh.”¹⁷ Thānvī's father, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq, envisioned for his son a distinguished scholarly career as a specialist of “the Arabic sciences” (*al-‘ulūm al-‘arabiyya*), shorthand for multiple religious disciplines, such as Qur’ānic exegesis, Muslim sacred law (*fiqh*), and Ḥadīth studies. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq therefore arranged for the young Thānvī to acquire basic knowledge of Arabic and Persian grammar and literature in his hometown of Thana Bhawan, before enrolling him for rigorous study at the Deoband seminary.¹⁸

¹⁶ In both its physical and philosophic sense, the building can also be used to understand how formations of knowledge and action do not entirely result out of personal agency. The horizons of knowledge and the parameters of action are mediated by and situated within specific built spaces—within walls, borders, thresholds, doors, windows, and so on. Here, I am drawing on Heidegger's understanding of “the building”: “Standing there, the building holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so makes the storm itself manifest in its violence. The luster and gleam of the stone...first brings to light the light of the day...Tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their distinctive shapes and thus come to appear as what they are” (Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 42)

¹⁷ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānīh*, 1:24. According to Sayyid ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasani, Mawlānā Faṭḥ Muḥammad's recitation of the Qur’ān stirred and motivated his audiences. He was a man of great self-discipline who eschewed modern transportation devices and travelled by foot instead. His teaching career at the Jāmi‘ al-‘Ulūm in Kanpur overlapped with that of Thānvī (Qārī Fuyūz al-Raḥmān, *Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh Muhājir-i Makkī aur unke khulafā’* [Karachi: Majlis-i Nashriyāt-i Islām, 1984], 60-61). For more on Mawlānā Faṭḥ Muḥammad, see Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānīh*, 1:149-152.

¹⁸ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānīh*, 1:28. In Thana Bhawan, Thānvī also studied Persian texts from his maternal uncle, Wājīd ‘Alī, the local connoisseur of Persian literature (Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānīh*, 1:27).

Thānvī's childhood years moulded his later intellectual and spiritual trajectory in profound ways. His mother died when he was around five or six years of age.¹⁹ The loss of the maternal figure shaped Thānvī's mature sensibilities. This early experience could explain his prolonged attachment to women's domestic and civil issues. Thānvī reported that his father showed extra affection in his behavior toward his children after the passing of their mother:

For breakfast, he fed us morsels of gourmet bread, sautéed with butter, by his own hands. He nurtured us with great affection and we eventually overcame the grief from the loss of our mother...In those days, we refused to eat our meals whenever we felt desolate and disheartened. He remedied our despondency by giving each of us a rupee. His gift would bring back our joy and we would partake of our meals.²⁰

From his childhood onwards, Thānvī appreciated the life of solitude and inwardness. For Thānvī's disciples and followers, their ṣūfī master's childhood years were graced by purity of character and zeal for learning. Ghawrī reported that the young Thānvī was passionate for the daily ritual prayers, and even woke up during the late hours of the night to perform the supererogatory prayer known as *tahajjud*. As an adolescent, he practiced the art of oratory in the local mosque whenever it was empty.²¹ Ghawrī also reported that Thānvī assumed a position of leadership when among his playground peers.

The Deoband Years

Thānvī's next scene of intellectual development was the *madrasa* at Deoband. For a few decades in the mid-nineteenth century, North Indian *madrasas* became inactive due to insufficient state funds. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, however, numerous community-funded *madrasas* had re-emerged, especially in rural towns

¹⁹ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*, 1:21.

²⁰ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*, 1:21-22.

²¹ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*, 1:24.

removed from urban centers of colonial influence such as Delhi. While these new institutions embraced a diverse curriculum covering the rational sciences (*ma‘qūlāt*) and the traditional sciences (*manqūlāt*), they emphasized especially the study of sacred law and prophetic traditions. These institutions also embraced ṣūfism, and teachers encouraged graduates to become ṣūfī initiates by pledging their allegiance to a ṣūfī master (this pledge involved an officiating ritual known as *bay‘a*). Many graduates of these *madrasas* therefore supplemented their theological and legal training with mystical instruction.

Thānvī initiated his studies at Deoband in 1878, two years before the death of its major luminary Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī.²² At that time, the Deoband *madrasa* was gradually becoming “one of the most outstanding theological seminaries in the Muslim world.”²³ While Thānvī did not study under Qāsim Nānautvī, he attended the scholarly giant’s lectures on the *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, a Qur’ān commentary authored by medieval Egyptian scholars, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 1459) and Jālāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505).²⁴ At Deoband, Thānvī’s professors included Muḥammad Ya‘qūb Nānautvī (d. 1884), Mullā Maḥmūd, Manfa‘at ‘Alī (d. 1909), and Maḥmūd Ḥasan (d. 1920). Of these illustrious teachers, Thānvī was most attached to Ya‘qūb Nānautvī, acquiring from the latter a great deal of traditional acumen and a particular penchant for combining the

²² Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānīh*, 1: 27.

²³ Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan: 1857-1964* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 108. Aziz Ahmad further adds: Deoband “produced most of the great ‘ulamā’ of the second quarter of the twentieth century: Ashraf ‘Alī Thānawī, who popularized traditional Islam among the less educated, apart from his authorship of monumental theological works” (*Islamic Modernism*, 108).

²⁴ See Muḥammad Zakariyya Kāndhlavī’s short piece, “Zikr-i Ḥakīm al-ummat Ḥazrat Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī,” in *Chalīs barey musulmān*, ed. Muḥammad Akbar Shāh Bukhārī (Karachi: Idārat al-Qur’ān, 2001): 1:207-216.

rational and the mystical in his scholarship and everyday devotion.²⁵ Ya‘qūb Nānautvī also trained Thānvī in legal reasoning and crafting legal responsa (the science of *iftā’* and *fatwā*).

Recalling his student days, Thānvī said, “Mawlānā Ya‘qūb Nānautvī’s lectures were in fact occasions for mystical concentration (*tawajjuh*). His lectures on Qur’ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*) not only dived into the depths of scriptural verses, but also brought down a stream of tears on his cheeks.”²⁶ Ya‘qūb Nānautvī’s lachrymose pedagogical style modelled for Thānvī an intense affective mode of belonging to tradition. Following Ya‘qūb Nānautvī’s example, Thānvī developed into a committed traditionalist who studied discursive knowledge with a strong mystical bent. Thānvī alluded to the sort of moral lessons he learned from his teachers: “Our saintly elders, especially Mawlānā Ya‘qūb Nānautvī, never used bitter words when talking about their adversaries. Theirs was not a sectarian and divisive world. They were free from narrow-mindedness and prejudice, as characteristic of genuine religious leaders.”²⁷

As a student at Deoband, Thānvī managed his time with rigorous discipline, mastering even unassigned Arabic and Persian texts during his leisure hours.²⁸ He also learned about other religions by debating with Deoband’s local Hindu priests and visiting Christian missionaries.²⁹ On his graduation day, Thānvī impressed the Ḥadīth scholar Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī (d. 1905) with sharp replies to the latter’s quizzing questions.³⁰

²⁵ The definitive biography of Ya‘qūb Nānautvī is: Muḥammad Anwār al-Ḥasan, *Sīrat-i Ya‘qūb wa Mamlūk* (Karachi: Maktaba-yi Dār al-‘Ulūm Karāchī, 2007).

²⁶ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*, 1:36.

²⁷ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Hakīm al-ummat*, 22:280.

²⁸ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*, 1:30.

²⁹ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*, 1:32.

³⁰ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*, 1:32.

Prior to his graduation, Thānvī had corresponded with Gangohī regarding the possibility of becoming the latter’s ṣūfī disciple. Gangohī, however, gently refused, arguing that formal ṣūfī initiation would undermine the meticulous concentration needed for mastering religious discourses. Thānvī longed for spiritual guidance and was not content with Gangohī’s reasoning. He wrote directly to Gangohī’s ṣūfī master, Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh, hoping that the latter would direct Gangohī to reconsider his position. Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh, however, invited Thānvī to take the initiatory pledge with himself.³¹ Thānvī was overjoyed to receive this unexpected reply and wasted no time in pursuing an epistolary relationship with Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh. Who was Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh?

Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh al-Fārūqī was a renowned Muslim spiritual guide and mystical author of colonial India. Ebrahim Moosa eloquently captures Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh’s image within colonial South Asian Islam: “a Magus-like figure—an extraordinary wise man who directed the spiritual lives of his disciples.”³² Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh was born in 1817 (22 Safar 1233 AH) in the North Indian village of Nanota.³³ He studied Persian and Arabic grammar and rudimentary theological and legal texts in Delhi. In the Mughal capital, he also received his initial mystical training under the guidance of the Naqshbandī-Mujaddadī saint, Mawlānā Naṣīr al-Dīn. When the latter luminary passed away, Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh became a disciple of the Chishtī master, Miyan Jī Nūr

³¹ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānīh*, 1:169-70.

³² Moosa, *What is a Madrasa?* 103.

³³ For Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh’s biography, see Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Imdād al-mushtāq ilā ashraf al-akhlāq* (Lahore: Islāmī Kutub Khāna, n.d.); Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Kamālāt-i Imdādiyya* (Lahore: Maktabat al-Furqān, n.d.); Muḥammad Anwār al-Ḥasan Sherkotī, *Hayāt-i Imdād* (Deoband: Kutub Khāna Qāsimī, 1976); Laṭīfullāh, *Anfās-i Imdādiyya: sawānīh ḥaṣrat Shāh Imdād Allāh Fārūqī Muhājir-i Makkī* (Karachi: Idāra Nashr al-Ma‘ārif, 1995); Qārī Fuyūz al-Raḥmān, *Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh Muhājir-i Makkī aur unke khulafā’* (Karachi: Majlis-i Nashriyāt-i Islām, 1984).

Muḥammad Jhanjhānvī (d. ca. 1843), who granted him “spiritual succession” (*khilāfā*).³⁴ Ḥājī Imdād Allāh was an avid reader of Rūmī’s *Masnavī*, reading the Persian classic in its entirety several times with Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Razzāq Jhanjhānvī (d. ca. 1876).³⁵ Ḥājī Imdād Allāh memorized the Qur’ān and was observant of the *sharī‘a* in his everyday life. He undertook his first pilgrimage to Mecca in 1845. During the skirmishes of 1857-58, he participated in a failed anti-colonial *jihād* against British forces in the North Indian town of Shāmlī, after which he fled to Arabia. Mecca was his home from 1860 until his death in 1899. In the holy city, he lectured on Rūmī’s *Masnavī*, engaged in mystical rituals, and counselled hundreds of Indian disciples. He also authored numerous works of prose and poetry in Persian and Urdu. Ḥājī Imdād Allāh’s guidance and encouragement was crucial for Thānvī’s intellectual and spiritual formation.

While Thānvī pursued the spiritual path under the supervision of Ḥājī Imdād Allāh, he continued to revere Gangohī. As Thānvī later remarked: “Of my learned elders, I was spiritually attached to Mawlānā Gangohī more than anyone else, with the exception of Ḥājī Imdād Allāh. Mawlānā Gangohī was indeed unique. I have not seen anyone like him, for the esoteric and the exoteric fused in him so perfectly.”³⁶ Like Gangohī, Thānvī also sought a similar fusion of discursive and mystical knowledge. Gangohī also modelled for Thānvī good character and effective communication skills: “God is indeed Great! Mawlānā Gangohī was a man of great dignity. While he was reticent, his speech

³⁴ Miyan Jī Nūr Muḥammad Jhanjhānvī was born around 1786 and studied at the Madrasa-i Raḥīmiyya in Delhi. Miyan Jī “was a man of unassuming ways and devoted himself to the task of teaching children. However, he had a very wide network of disciples” (Nizami, “Madrasahs, Scholars, and Saints,” 103).

³⁵ Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Razzāq Jhanjhānvī was the grandson of Muftī Ilāhī Bakhsh Kāndhlavī, a renowned Indian authority on Rūmī’s *Masnavī*. For the latter’s biography, see Nūr al-Ḥasan Rāshid Kāndhlavī, *Mukhtaṣar tazkira-yi baḥr al-‘ulūm khātīm-i Masnavī-yi Mawlānā Rūm ḥaḡrat Muftī Ilāhī Bakhsh Kāndhlavī* (Kāndhla: Muftī Ilāhī Bakhsh Academy, 2001).

³⁶ ‘Alawī, *Ma’āsir-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 51.

was clear, high-toned, always adequate to the matter at hand...I never saw a man endowed with such praiseworthy habits and qualities.”³⁷ Gangohī reciprocated this love and affection by once expressing to Thānvī, “I become alive whenever you visit me.”³⁸ Thus, Thānvī’s formative intellectual experiences were marked by the tutelage and training he received from senior scholars and luminaries. The significant generational gap between these senior scholars and the young Thānvī meant that in his teenage years he was able to acquire seasoned sensibilities.

Thānvī’s reverence for these senior luminaries illustrates how orthodox belonging to tradition involved heartfelt attachment to embodied authority. In his retrospective recorded conversations, Thānvī rarely discussed the texts he read at the Deoband seminary. However, he frequently spoke about these saintly figures. He recalled his memories of spending time with them, frequently citing their interpretations of scripture and tradition to counsel his disciples. Thānvī idealized his mentors, weaving together his fond memories of them to generate an imaginary of Deobandī sainthood. This idealization served him well after his graduation, for it established him as a budding scholar who had studied with saintly masters of the Islamic discursive tradition.

The Kanpur Years

After graduating from the Deoband seminary in 1884, Thānvī accompanied his father to Mecca in order to perform the annual *hajj* ritual. Father and son boarded a ship from India to Arabia. The ship sailed tumultuously in torrent waters, keeping the pilgrims on board to constantly beseech God for a safe arrival. Thānvī became ecstatic upon

³⁷ Nasīm Aḥmad Farīdī Amrohī, “Ḥakīm al-ummat Ḥazrat Mawlānā Thānvī kī meḥfīl-i irshād.” *Al-Furqān* 47.7 (July 1979): 39.

³⁸ ‘Alawī, *Ma’āsir-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 52.

reaching the holy sanctuary in Mecca. His sense of reverence for holy spaces was quite acute: “I would hesitate even to spit in the streets of Mecca.”³⁹ The sight of the Ka‘ba captured his heart: “My passion for the Ka‘ba was overbearing and absorbing, and I have never experienced such rapture for anything else in my entire life.”⁴⁰

During this trip, he had the opportunity to spend time with his ṣūfī master, Ḥājī Imdād Allāh. Thānvī also studied the art of Qur’ānic recitation with Qārī Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh, an Indian teacher at Mecca’s Madrasa Ṣawlaṭiyya⁴¹. After this initial visit to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, Thānvī returned to his homeland to continue the life of study and teaching at Kanpur. This phase of his life—the Kanpur years—lasted for almost a decade and a half.⁴² He taught at two seminaries during these years: first at the Madrasa Fayz-i ‘Ām and then at the Madrasa Jāmi‘ al-‘Ulūm. At both places, Thānvī established himself as a solid teacher of Muslim theology and legalism. As the Deobandī historian Sayyid Mahboob Rizvi put it: “Hearing about the fame of [Thānvī’s] teaching of Hadith at Kanpur, students used to flock to him from far off places.”⁴³

During this time period, Thānvī received a modest salary for his teaching services at the Madrasa Jāmi‘ al-‘Ulūm. Receiving monetary compensation for teaching God’s word and prophetic traditions troubled Thānvī, even though latter-day Ḥanafī jurists had condoned receiving a salary for teaching sacred texts. He searched for an alternative part-time occupation and decided to pursue the study and practice of Indo-Greek medicine

³⁹ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ*, 1:170.

⁴⁰ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ*, 1:170.

⁴¹ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ*, 1:36-37.

⁴² After his graduation, Thānvī spent a few months teaching in Kanpur before proceeding for his first pilgrimage.

⁴³ Sayyid Mahboob Rizvi, *History of the Dar al-Ulum Deoband* (Deoband: Dar al-‘Ulum Deoband, 1980-1981), 2:33.

(*tibb*).⁴⁴ He left Kanpur and travelled to Delhi in order to study with the famed physician Ḥakīm ‘Abd al-Majīd Khān.⁴⁵ The administrators of Madrasa Jāmi‘ al-‘Ulūm followed Thānvī to Delhi and persuaded him to come back to Kanpur. Thānvī returned to his professorship after studying medicine for two weeks. His vague familiarity with medicine inspired many of the analogies he deployed in his recorded conversations, public sermons, and published works. Ghawrī used this anecdote to demonstrate Thānvī’s coveted stature in Kanpur.

The Muslims of Kanpur approached Thānvī for moral counsel and religious education. He later recalled his Kanpur years in memorable terms:

The people of Kanpur treated me with great respect and love. They gave me ample assistance. I did not feel isolated from my homeland, and became very fond of Kanpur. Instead of inscribing my name on my kitchen utensils, I wrote the name “Kanpur.” Even today, the inscription of that city’s name on my utensils brings back good memories. If my revered Ḥājī Imdād Allāh had not signalled me to relocate to Thāna Bhawan, I would have stayed in Kanpur for the long haul. My fame is indebted to the people of Kanpur. In reality, I did not deserve this fame, both then and now. I still have great affection for the people of Kanpur and remain grateful to them. God the Most High made them love me. Even Muslims who adhered to opposing schools of thought respected me.⁴⁶

The above statement represented Thānvī’s retrospective reconstruction of his Kanpur years. However, as I will illustrate below, other biographical details document that despite a bevy of devotees in Kanpur, Thānvī felt a sense of bad conscience in this urban setting. Nonetheless, Thānvī’s Kanpur years edified him in multiple ways. First, the teaching experience enabled him to master the texts he had studied at a young age.

⁴⁴ In colonial India, *tibb* or *ūnānī dawā’ī* was a respectable profession among many devout Muslims. See Seema Alavi, *Islam and Healing: Loss and Recovery of an Indo-Muslim Medical Tradition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Guy N. A. Attewell, *Refiguring Unani Tibb: Plural Healing in Late Colonial India* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2007).

⁴⁵ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānīh*, 1:44.

⁴⁶ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānīh*, 1:43.

Second, Kanpur's urban setting introduced him to the public concerns of Muslims, which he later addressed in his sermons and writings. Third, his teaching tenure at Kanpur made him realize that a seminary career was not his true vocation.

In 1893, Thānvī embarked on a second pilgrimage to Arabia, where he embraced the opportunity to spend six months in his ṣūfī master's company. While the details of this spiritual retreat remain unclear, the information recorded in Thānvī's biographies document the formation of an intense relationship of affection between Thānvī and Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh. Ghawrī likened the joy and pleasure of their reconvening in Mecca to the reunion of the biblical figures, Jacob being reunited with his son, Joseph.⁴⁷ Ghawrī dramatically described the results of this retreat:

The consequences of this retreat were magnificent! Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh's power of spiritual transmission (*quwwat-i ifāza*) met Mawlānā Thānvī's capacity for spiritual absorption (*qābiliyyat-i istifāza*). It took only a few days before the emergence of dispositional affinity (*munāsabat*) between the master and the disciple. Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh would unhesitatingly say to him, "You tread my path with grace and excellence."⁴⁸

This passage conveys Thānvī's absorbed mimesis of his ṣūfī master. Their relationship entailed the transmission of prophetic affect from the master to the disciple, so that the latter could transmit this *felt light* to others. Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh referred to Thānvī in loving ways, referring to him as his "grandson" (there was a 46-year gap in their ages).⁴⁹ In Mecca, he addressed Thānvī not by words such as *mawlānā* or *mawlawī*, but endearingly addressed him as "Miyan Ashraf 'Alī" (almost equivalent to Mr. Ashraf 'Alī).⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*, 1:183.

⁴⁸ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*, 1:184.

⁴⁹ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*, 1:193.

⁵⁰ However, Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh did use *mawlawī* for Thānvī in his correspondence.

According to Ghawrī, Thānvī had already inhabited the spiritual stations known as “longing for the divine” (*shawq*) and “intimacy with the divine” (*uns*) while teaching at Kanpur. This trip to Mecca brought him face to face with “submissive incorporation into the divine” (*‘abdiyyat*), the spiritual station where God’s unity was manifest to the mystic. For Ghawrī, this ontological state was inspired by the mystical revelations Thānvī experienced in the company of Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh. As Ghawrī reported, during these six months, Thānvī deeply contemplated the “ontological unity of God” (*tawḥīd-i wujūdī*). He composed many brief treatises during this period, including one titled, *Anwār al-wujūd fī aṭwār al-shuhūd* (*The Illuminations of Existence in the Precincts of Presence*), and presented these texts to Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh. The master praised the disciple’s intellectual formulations of mystical truths. Thānvī’s mode of piety was what Ebrahim Moosa aptly describes as “cerebral and intellectually stunning.”⁵¹

Thānvī was keen on writing. He used the technology of inscription to express, or even induce, his mystical experiences. His Meccan spiritual retreat was marked by ecstatic experiences, which he conveyed in a poem about divine unity (*tawḥīd*). He later recanted this poem, believing that many of its lines were “ecstatic expressions” (*shaṭḥīyāt* or *shaṭaḥāt*). The *shaṭḥīyāt* are a genre of ṣūfī utterances expressed during moments of mystical ecstasy and spiritual excitement. These utterances do not distinguish between scriptural and post-scriptural revelation, prophethood and sainthood, and most importantly, God and creation. As Carl W. Ernst points out, “Post-scriptural inspiration is ambiguous; for the mystic it can be the key to divine revelation, but to outsiders it can be

⁵¹ Moosa, *What is a Madrasa?* 105

a blasphemous parody of scripture.”⁵² For some orthodox theologians and strict observers of Muslim sacred law, these utterances demonstrated ṣūfism’s antinomian and heretical tendencies. Thānvī therefore did not make this poem public, fearing that it might parody normative doctrinal teaching and thereby create confusion among lay Muslims or disappoint his more conservative Deobandī colleagues. However, Ghawrī claimed that Thānvī permitted the inclusion of the following lines from this poem in his biography, *Ashraf al-sawānīh*:

خودی جب تک رہی اس کو نہ پایا جب اسکو ڈھونڈھ پایا خود عدم تھے
حقیقت کیا تمہاری تھی میاں آہ یہ سب امداد کے طلب و کرم تھے

While the ego persisted God was not discovered/I exited into oblivion
when God was found.

Were you even anything at all but a man of lament?/All of this was the
grace and generosity of Imdād [Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh].⁵³

In these surviving lines, Thānvī referred to himself by the poetic name (*takhalluṣ*) “man of lament” (*Miyan-i Āh*) and attributed his nascent spiritual advancement to his ṣūfī master’s righteous company. Thānvī recited the full poem to several audiences in the daily gatherings of Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh. The master admired the poem: “This is not merely lip service. It represents his genuine state of being.”⁵⁴ Thānvī’s passion for the mystical doctrine of “ontological unity” (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) blossomed during this Meccan retreat. He found himself defending the most outspoken author of this doctrine, the Spanish mystic Ibn ‘Arabī (1165-1240). Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh approved of Thānvī’s elucidations of

⁵² Carl W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany, NY.: State University of New York Press, 1985), 3.

⁵³ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānīh*, 1:188.

⁵⁴ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānīh*, 1:188.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s mystical theology: “He [Thānvī] has a thorough understanding of this matter [*waḥdat al-wujūd*].”⁵⁵ Thānvī and Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh thus enjoyed perspectival unison regarding the co-implication of transcendence and immanence.

Thānvī also witnessed Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh’s openhearted attitude toward the multiple forms of ṣūfī ritual. This is explicit, for example, from the following anecdote narrated by Ghawrī:

Once a Meccan ṣūfī master of the Shādhiliyya order invited Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh and his associates to share food and fellowship with his Shādhilī followers. Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh accepted the invitation on the condition that there be a spiritual session involving music (*samā’*). Some of his disciples objected to this on legal grounds, and excused themselves from accompanying him. Mawlānā Thānvī, however, unhesitatingly accompanied his ṣūfī master...saying to the latter, “We are not more religious than you!”⁵⁶

Ghawrī painted a vivid picture of the musical gathering based on Thānvī’s recollections: “The Shādhilī master’s disciples formed a circle. The reciter (*munshid*) initiated the session by chanting one of God’s many names. Others started hymning as well. They hymned a particular divine name and then retreated into silence. The *munshid* then recited poems about God’s love...it was an enchanting and mesmerizing session for remembering God (*pur-luṭf aur pur-kayf majlis-i zikr*).”⁵⁷ On their return from this gathering, Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh asked his young disciple, “Was this pleasurable for you?” Thānvī replied, “It was indeed!” The master then said, “This in reality is the so-called

⁵⁵ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ*, 1:189. As Zaman notes, “The stream within the Chishti order to which Imdad Allah belonged was especially devoted to the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240), a Spanish mystic best known for the view that God is the *only* reality and that this reality continually manifests itself in all creation” (Zaman, *Ashraf ‘Ali Thanawi*, 22).

⁵⁶ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ*, 1:190.

⁵⁷ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ*, 1:190.

music that has become a source of apprehension for some of our friends.”⁵⁸ Ḥājī Imdād Allāh esteemed Thānvī’s open-minded approach to the colorful expressions of sacred devotion. In this regard, Thānvī differed from some of the stricter followers of Muslim sacred law in the ranks of the Deobandīs (such as Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī).

Ghawrī’s account of Thānvī’s spiritual affinity with Imdād Allāh served to consolidate Thānvī’s position as a genuine heir of the Chishtī order, the pre-eminent ṣūfī order of South Asia.⁵⁹ Critics of the Deoband movement claimed otherwise; for them, Imdād Allāh had not authorized Thānvī and his senior Deobandī teachers as his “spiritual successors” (*khulafā*). Imdād Allāh had instead permitted them to counsel and teach religious doctrine to lay Muslims.⁶⁰ This argument, however, contradicts numerous textual documents establishing correspondence between Imdād Allāh and his Deobandī disciples. Thus the doyen of Chishtī historiography, Khalīq Aḥmad Nizāmī, identified Deobandī scholars, including Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī, Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, and Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, as full-fledged ṣūfī successors of Ḥājī Imdād Allāh.⁶¹ Nonetheless, the critics of Deobandism alluded to a genuine difference between Imdād Allāh’s ṣūfī’s disposition and the mainstream Deobandī appropriation of ṣūfism. Critical readers have yet to iron out to the exact nature of Imdād Allāh’s spiritual legacy vis-à-vis his Deobandī *khulafā*. It seems to me that while Imdād Allāh was content with Thānvī, he was not too

⁵⁸ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānīh*, 1:190.

⁵⁹ The most comprehensive study of this order is Khalīq Aḥmad Nizāmī, *Tārīkh-i mashā’ikh-i Chisht* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007). For a more critical and theoretically informed study, see Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

⁶⁰ For an exposition of this argument, see Waḥīd Aḥmad Mas‘ūd, *Ṣābrī silsila* (Badaun: Nizāmī Press, 1971), 46. However, the first generation of Deobandī theologians did not turn to Imdād Allāh for permission to disseminate doctrine and religious teaching. They sought this permission from masters of Ḥadīth such as Shāh ‘Abd al-Ghanī.

⁶¹ Khalīq Aḥmad Nizāmī, *Tārīkh-i mashā’ikh-i Chisht* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1:274.

happy about the direction in which *madrasa*-based Chishtism was heading under the aegis of Deoband. To put it otherwise, Thānvī approximated Imdād Allāh’s Chishtī teaching in a more devoted manner than all other Deobandīs. Two anecdotes from Ghawrī’s text will serve to illustrate how Thānvī took Imdād Allāh as his exemplar in terms of social life and mystical disposition. Both anecdotes are about events that took place during Thānvī’s second Meccan retreat (*circa* 1893).

This first anecdote might also explain why Thānvī did not leave behind any biological progeny.⁶² The story goes: Thānvī’s wife had joined him in Mecca, along with her maternal aunt. The aunt once had the opportunity to converse with Imdād Allāh about Thānvī’s marital affairs. She requested the saint to beseech God to bless the couple with a child. Imdād Allāh later conveyed the aunt’s wishes to Thānvī, saying, “While I do pray for you to be blessed with children, I desire for you to be just as I am [i.e. childless].” According to Ghawrī, Imdād Allāh then enumerated the disadvantages of rearing children in their corrupted society. After hearing Imdād Allāh’s concerns, Thānvī replied: “I desire for myself the condition of life you desire for yourself.” Imdād Allāh heard this “and became entirely elated.”⁶³ Ghawrī deployed this anecdote to document how there was almost a perfect mimetic concordance (*mushābahat*) between Thānvī and his ṣūfī master.

The second anecdote sheds light on Thānvī’s emulation of Imdād Allāh’s mystical tendencies. While Imdād Allāh was a man of letters, he preferred the life of the heart to

⁶² Thānvī did have a step-daughter (who was the biological daughter of his nephew, Mawlānā Sa’īd Aḥmad ‘Usmānī). The latter’s widow was Thānvī’s second wife. Mawlānā Sa’īd Aḥmad ‘Usmānī was the elder brother of the Ḥadīth scholar Mawlānā Zafar Aḥmad ‘Usmānī. Thānvī’s step-daughter was married to Muftī Jamīl Aḥmad Thānvī, who relocated to Lahore after the partition of Pakistan. Jamīl Aḥmad Thānvī’s son, Mawlānā Musharraf ‘Alī Thānvī, directs a sizable *madrasa* in Lahore and counsels disciples. See Khalīl Aḥmad Thānvī, *Aks-i Jamīl* (Lahore: Idāra-yi Ashraf al-Taḥqīq, n.d.).

⁶³ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānīh*, 1:182.

discursive learning. When Thānvī's retreat had come to a close and he bid farewell to his ṣūfī master, Imdād Allāh wished to gift his able disciple a sizable collection of books from his personal library. Thānvī kindly requested for something else: "Grant me some wealth from your blessed heart instead of these books." This reply pleased Imdād Allāh, for it indicated Thānvī's recognition of the superiority of mystical knowledge over discursive knowledge. Imdād Allāh said to Thānvī, "Yes, *miyan* [mister], you are right, books alone are nothing." After recording this anecdote, Ghawrī mentioned the Persian couplet: "Throw a hundred books and a hundred leaflets [papers] into the fire/Make your heart a garden with the light of Truth" (*ṣad kitāb o ṣad waraq dar nār kun/sīna-rā az nūr-i ḥaqq gulzār kun*).⁶⁴

Thānvī returned to Kanpur enriched with mystical insight. Imdād Allāh had set the disciple's heart on fire! Thānvī glowed with a newfound light that made possible deeper sightings of the legal tradition. While most of his mystical activity was personal and solitary, Thānvī also participated in Kanpur's popular ṣūfī gatherings (*majālis*) and annual celebrations of the Prophet Muḥammad's birthday (*mawlid*). More conservative Deobandī scholars, especially Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī and his disciples, disapproved of these rituals. For them, the Muslim scripture and the Prophet Muḥammad's teaching did not warrant these practices. They argued that popular extra-canonical ritualized practices, such as the annual celebrations of saints (*'urs*), were "wicked deviations" (*bid'āt sai'iyya*). Thānvī had qualms about this disparaging judgment. For him, extra-canonical devotional acts were neither obligatory nor prohibited but merely permissible. In Imdād Allāh's footsteps, Thānvī adopted an eclectic and relaxed attitude toward such issues.

⁶⁴ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ*, 1:194.

Thānvī's openness to popular religion did not go unchallenged within Deobandī circles. Word soon reached Gangohī who censured Thānvī's lax attitude. This negative development unsurprisingly perturbed Thānvī.

Thānvī's anxiety was understandable: scholars of sacred law (and even devout lay Muslims) were expected to obey the Prophet Muḥammad's teachings and to eschew all thoughts and actions that opposed or altered the Prophetic model. Thānvī was among the many piety-bound and law-observant North Indian Muslims who took Gangohī to be an exceptional living approximation of the Muḥammadan ideal. Gangohī, after all, was the star student of Shāh 'Abd al-Ghanī Mujaddidī (1820-1879), a superb Ḥadīth teacher who subjugated both mysticism and canonical sacred law to Prophetic precepts. Shāh 'Abd al-Ghanī's intellectual disposition reflected that of his teacher, Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq of Delhi (1783-1846), an active member of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd's militant anti-colonial movement and the maternal grandson of the famed Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz (d. 1824). Thānvī thus inherited the theological sensibilities of a group of scholars who had taken the Prophetic turn in South Asian Islam. These scholars took inspiration from the revivalist movement known as the Muḥammadan Way (*Ṭarīqa-yi Muḥammadiyya*). This nineteenth-century movement entailed a puritanical renovation of traditionalism, grounding both mysticism and canonical sacred law in scriptural sources. For these theologians, all matters of doctrine and ritual were to be debated, condoned, or condemned in light of the Prophet's pristine teaching. Given his steeped formation in this school of thought, Thānvī was chagrined to learn that a senior orthodox authority disapproved of his ways.

Thānvī therefore wrote directly to Gangohī about the legal status of the popular ṣūfī practices under question. Thānvī and Gangohī had five exchanges in correspondence, beginning the conversation in early May 1897 and bringing it to a halt in early July 1897.⁶⁵ Thānvī and Gangohī wrote the initial couple of letters in Arabic, but switched to Urdu in all following correspondence. Thānvī wrote: “I recently met Mawlānā Munawwar ‘Alī who said to me, ‘the most revered Mawlānā Gangohī is disappointed in you for you have adopted your relative’s course of action that conflicts with the ways of Mawlānā Gangohī’.”⁶⁶ The relative in question was Thānvī’s Hyderabad-based maternal uncle, Imdād ‘Alī, who had recently visited Kanpur. The latter was a free-spirited mystic who emphasized ecstatic experiences and passionate longing for the divine over the observance of canonical norms. The uncle’s visit coincided with Thānvī’s intense mystical raptures. With his ṣūfī master exiled in Mecca, Thānvī sought his uncle’s counsel regarding how to cope with these sporadic outbursts. While Ḥājī Imdād Allāh tolerated Thānvī’s turning to a second master, Gangohī was disappointed since the master in question was not *sharī‘a*-bound.

In order to assuage Gangohī’s concerns, Thānvī reported that his condition should be analogized to that of a drowning man who took help from wherever he could in order

⁶⁵ Their lengthy correspondence appeared in ‘Āshiq Ilāhī Mīrathī’s extended biography of Gangohī. See ‘Āshiq Ilāhī Mīrathī, *Tazkirat al-Rashīd* (Lahore: Idāra-yi Islāmiyyāt, 1986), 1:114-136. The detail of this correspondence is as follows: Thānvī Letter 1: 2 May 1897 (29 Dhū’l-Qa‘da 1314); Gangohī Response 1: 7 May 1897 (5 Dhū’l-Hijja 1314); Thānvī Letter 2: 15 May 1897 (13 Dhū’l-Hijja 1314); Gangohī Response 2: 6 June 1897 (5 Muḥarram 1315); Thānvī Letter 3: 9 June 1897 (8 Muḥarram 1315); Gangohī Response 3: 13 June 1897 (12 Muḥarram 1315); Thānvī Letter 4: 19 June 1897 (18 Muḥarram 1315); Gangohī Response 4: 26 June 1897 (25 Muḥarram 1315); Thānvī Letter 5: 30 June 1897 (29 Muḥarram 1315). Mīrathī did not document the last couple of letters, indicating that they merely consisted of Gangohī’s appreciation of Thānvī’s recognition of the true nature of the matter at hand, and Thānvī’s expression of gratitude for Gangohī’s guidance.

⁶⁶ Mīrathī, *Tazkirat al-Rashīd*, 1:114. The word used here for both “course of action” and “ways” is *ṭarīq*, which is an approximation of *maslak* in this context.

to save his life. He was nonetheless figuring out a way to sever his spiritual relationship with the anomic uncle. He explained his desire to do this privately and not publicly. His own explanation is worth quoting in the original Arabic:

لكن لا تطيق همتي ان اناذب بالمخالفة مع الإعلان. عسى ان يكون من الله تعالى بمكان.
فاذاؤه يوجب الهوان و الخسران. فاني احسبه من فرقة اهل الملامة. و لكن ليس بمنصب الإمامة

I have no determination to denounce him publicly, for in God's sight he might occupy an elevated position. Therefore, causing him grief could be a source of my disgrace and destruction. I consider him to be among the "self-blamers" and unfit for [religious] leadership!⁶⁷

Thānvī's ethical reasoning, however, did not persuade Gangohī who rhetorically asked: "If you displayed your relationship with him openly, then should you not sever it openly as well?"⁶⁸ Thānvī explained to Gangohī that not all aspects of the relationship were public; parts of it were private. Gangohī advised Thānvī to sever ties with his uncle however he deemed appropriate. The conversation then moved to discussing two substantial questions: (1) what was the legal status of extra-canonical devotional acts, such as celebrations of the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid*)? (2) what were the limits of the spiritual authority of a ṣūfī master (*shaykh-i ṭarīqat*)?

Thānvī analogized popular practices such as *mawlid* and the annual celebrations of ṣūfī saints (*'urs*) to the long-established conventional practices and rituals of the ṣūfī orders. He deployed this analogy in multiple logical explanations that more or less exonerated the extra-canonical rituals from blame. First, Thānvī reasoned: "These acts are in fact deviations (*bid'āt*) if they are considered to be "necessary devotion" (*'ibādat maqṣūda*) and guaranteed means of drawing close to the divine (*qurbat*). However, these

⁶⁷ The "self-blamers" (*malāmatiyya*) referred to mystics who eschewed ostentatious embodiment of normative piety.

⁶⁸ Mīrathī, *Tazkirat al-Rashīd*, 1:115.

acts are not *bid'āt* if they are considered as constituting customary matters (*umūr 'ādiyya*) that serve the greater good (*maṣlaḥa*). In this case, they would be categorized as permissible (*mubāḥ*).⁶⁹ Thānvī explained that many customary practices were merely permissible and furnished the example of established ṣūfī “litanies and rituals” (*azkār wa ashghāl*). He added: “If these ṣūfī practices were taken to be necessary devotional acts, then undoubtedly they would be considered *bid'āt*.”⁷⁰ Thānvī’s first explanation emphasized the intention of the doer: the legal status of an extra-canonical practice was contingent on the understanding and intention of the practitioner. According to this logic, the practitioner who understood that an extra-canonical practice was not an end-in-itself was beyond reproach.

Second, while an extra-canonical practice was not a “doctrinal deviation” (*bid'at i'tiqādīyya*), its performance constituted “practical deviation” (*bid'at 'amaliyya*).⁷¹ Thānvī again analogized these practices to the established rituals of the ṣūfī orders. Third, he reasoned that only intelligent persons were mindful of the distinction between doctrine and practice. In other words, only some people understood the difference between the obligatory norms and the extra-canonical acts of devotional life. Thānvī argued that most lay Muslims did not grasp this distinction. It was thus mandatory to avoid (*wājib al-ijtināb*) these practices in order to safeguard the doctrinal formation of ordinary Muslims. Thānvī then returned to his grand analogy: “However, we find the same problem with the established rituals of the ṣūfī orders, which lay Muslims also consider necessary and embody with strict adherence, thinking that these rituals are doctrinally and practically

⁶⁹ Mīrathī, *Tazkirat al-Rashīd*, 1:116.

⁷⁰ Mīrathī, *Tazkirat al-Rashīd*, 1:116.

⁷¹ Mīrathī, *Tazkirat al-Rashīd*, 1:116.

obligatory. But this attitude of lay Muslims does not bend the judgment of learned persons regarding these practices.”⁷²

Thānvī then extended his analogy of extra-canonical practices to ṣūfī rituals using a fourth line of reasoning. He explained, “Even if we were to accept the preceding arguments, it seems that these practices contradict some of the foundational principles of Ḥanafī legalism.”⁷³ Thānvī claimed that some ṣūfī rituals also contradicted Abū Ḥanīfa’s teaching. The latter rejected the “audible remembrance of God” (*zīkr-i jahrī*), while the saints of many other ṣūfī orders condoned the practice. Thānvī therefore argued: “It seems clear from this that only those extra-canonical practices are to be condemned that people erroneously consider doctrinally necessary...moreover, contradicting some of the principles of the Ḥanafī School does not necessarily entail contradicting the divine norms (*sharī‘a*).”⁷⁴

Thānvī employed utter reverence in his letter to Gangohī, dubbing the above explanations “student questions.” In his reply, Gangohī did not go into the details of Thānvī’s arguments. Instead, he refuted Thānvī’s grand analogy that compared the legality of extra-canonical devotional acts to ṣūfī rituals. Gangohī forcefully said, “You should pay attention to what I say. The specified rituals of our ṣūfī saints are no deviations at all. Your analogy perplexes me. I had not expected this from an intelligent person like yourself.”⁷⁵ Gangohī argued that “the acquisition of a relationship with the divine” (*taḥṣīl-i nisbat*) and “mindfulness toward God” (*tawajjuh ila Allāh*) were divine commandments (*ma’mūr min Allāh*). Gangohī argued that in the formative years of

⁷² Mīrathī, *Tazkirat al-Rashīd*, 1:116-17.

⁷³ Mīrathī, *Tazkirat al-Rashīd*, 1:117.

⁷⁴ Mīrathī, *Tazkirat al-Rashīd*, 1:117.

⁷⁵ Mīrathī, *Tazkirat al-Rashīd*, 1:121.

Islam, there was no need for specified rituals in order to execute these divine commandments because of early Muslims' temporal proximity to the Prophet and his Companions. The ṣūfī orders emerged in Islamic history in order to preserve the spiritual commandment to love and remember God. Particular ṣūfī methods and rituals were devised as “non-binding ways” to fulfil these commandments. The “binding ways”—rituals taught by the Prophet Muḥammad—always took priority over the non-binding practices. In sum, Gangohī faulted Thānvī for analogizing ṣūfī practices to extra-canonical practices.

The epistolary exchange between Thānvī and Gangohī illustrated a major tension within South Asian Islam: were mysticism and sacred law two sides of the same coin, or were they two distinct domains of piety? Answering this question was easy for Thānvī: mysticism and the sacred law were interlinked expressions of a single truth. Thānvī took Imdād Allāh as his spiritual guide believing that the latter was a ṣūfī who was fully observant of sacred law. Imdād Allāh, in Thānvī's early estimation, could adjudicate mystical and legal matters, as suggested by the aforementioned anecdote about their participation in a Shādhilī gathering consisting of music. Gangohī, however, did not take Imdād Allāh to be authoritative in matters of sacred law. Thānvī had therefore come to understand the authority of spiritual mediation differently than Gangohī. Thānvī suppressed his different perspective on this matter and eventually assented to Gangohī's view. At the same time, the specter of absolute loyalty to Imdād Allāh would later haunt Thānvī. After Gangohī's death in 1905, Thānvī penned extended meditations on the

jurisprudence of *ṣūfī* practices.⁷⁶ In these advanced writings, Thānvī sought the middle ground between the two spiritual authorities. Critical readers have yet to analyze the extent to which Thānvī succeeded in outlining an alternative to Imdād Allāh’s eclecticism and Gangohī’s conservatism.

On surface reading, Thānvī and Gangohī went back and forth on the legality of particular practices. On close reading, however, they created a taxonomy of different kinds of authority in Muslim thought, such as prophetic authority, the authority of the mystics, and that of the learned scholars. Thus, Thānvī and Gangohī interrogated the species of authority in Islam: prophetic, mystical, and scholarly. In effect, they debated the forms of mediation between transcendence and immanence. Thānvī and Gangohī were probing a fundamental question of religious thought: *who* has the authority to assume mediation between God and creation? Both men agreed that God’s chosen prophets, especially the Prophet Muḥammad, were endowed with the capacity to mediate between the Creator and humanity. Past authorities had disagreed in identifying who were the heirs of the prophets: the learned scholars or the spiritual authorities, folk of *sharī‘at* or folk of *ṭarīqat*. The Islamic juridical and mystical traditions recognized different recipients of the prophetic gift of mediation. For the jurists, the learned scholars of sacred law—the *‘ulāma’*—inherited the Prophet’s mediating function. The jurists furnished as their proof the Prophet’s saying, “The scholars are in fact the heirs of the prophets.” Muslim mystical authorities, however, inscribed mediation in the institution of

⁷⁶ The foremost of these texts was the 1909 volume: Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Al-Takashshuf ‘an muhimmāt al-taṣawwuf* (Karachi: Kutub Khāna Mazharī, n.d.). This edition also includes another text, namely, *Haqīqat al-ṭarīqa min al-sunnat al-anīqa*. For an English translation of the latter text, see Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *A Sufi Study of Hadith: Haqīqat al-tariqa min al-sunnat al-aniqa*, trans. Shaykh Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo (London: Turath, 2010).

sainthood. For them, the saint (*walī*) orchestrated the mediation between God and creation. They quoted the Qur’ān: “Indeed the friends of God experience neither fear nor grief” (10:62).

Muslim mystics also debated whether saints could surpass the spiritual ranks of prophets. Some ṣūfī theorists argued that sainthood was self-generated and consequently voluntary, while prophethood was God-given and therefore involuntary. If rendered into a syllogism, the argument of these theorists went something like this: voluntary human qualities are nobler than involuntary human qualities; sainthood is voluntary and prophethood is involuntary; therefore, sainthood is nobler than prophethood. Thānvī accepted this logic, but explained that this did not mean that Muslim saints exceeded the spiritual stations of God’s prophets. For him, this ṣūfī claim had always been about the sainthood of a prophet (*wilāyat al-nabī*), implying that the sainthood of a prophet was more praiseworthy than his prophethood, since a prophet chose saintliness for himself but received prophecy due to God’s sheer grace. In a similar vein, Thānvī accepted the superiority of the “mystical knower” (*‘ārīf*) over the “traditional knower” (*‘ālim*).

The Thāna Bhawan Years

A couple of years before Ḥājī Imdād Allāh’s death in 1899, Thānvī relocated to Thāna Bhawan, their mutual hometown, and began his lifelong career as a ṣūfī master in the same ṣūfī lodge once inhabited by Ḥājī Imdād Allāh. The latter saint was elated to see one of his foremost disciples re-enliven the spiritual scene of their hometown: “I am pleased that you have relocated to Thāna Bhawan. I hope and pray that the public at large will benefit from your physical and spiritual presence. You should keep yourself busy in revitalizing our *madrasa* and ṣūfī lodge. I always remember you in my prayers and my

thoughts.”⁷⁷ From 1897 until his death in 1943, Thānvī counselled lay Muslims and scholars of sacred law, travelled across colonial India in order to deliver sermons, and published hundreds of tracts on a diverse range of theological, legal, and mystical themes.

Thānvī’s relocation from Kanpur’s urban setting to Thana Bhawan’s rural setting marked a major shift in his life. On the surface, this relocation established Thānvī’s close connection with Imdād Allāh, for he had taken up residence in the latter’s ṣūfī lodge in their shared hometown and devoted himself entirely to spreading Imdād Allāh’s ṣūfī order. At a deeper level, however, this shift was symptomatic of Thānvī’s studied inclination and final acceptance of Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī’s criticism of popular ṣūfism. Thana Bhawan afforded Thānvī the opportunity to practice a form of ṣūfism that did not test his dual fidelities to Deobandī scripturalism and Chishtī eclecticism. In this way, the rural scene enabled him to intensify his intellectual and mystical vocation. North Indian rural contexts had long served the needs of Muslim intellectual and mystical elites. Small towns “managed to protect religious thought from being adulterated by political or material considerations.”⁷⁸ The sequestered aura of the ṣūfī lodge enabled Thānvī to devote his full time and energy to an intense self-designed program of religious revival. This program included meditative rituals (*murāqaba/ashghāl*), religious tuition (*ta’līm*), moral discipline (*tarbiyyat*), sermons (*khuṭbāt*), and literary production (*taṣnīf*).

Within a few years after relocating to Thana Bhawan, Thānvī soon published his most popular text, namely the legal compendium titled *Bihishtī zewar* (*Heavenly Ornaments*). *Heavenly Ornaments* was the ultimate revivalist text authored in the Urdu

⁷⁷ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Maktubāt-i Imdādiyya* (Lahore: Idāra-yi Islāmiyyat, 1977), 45. This letter from Ḥājī Imdād Allāh was dated 10 September 1897.

⁷⁸ Nizami, “Madrasahs, Scholars, and Saints,” 40.

language. The text documented the type of reform and revival Thānvī desired to institute in Muslim life: embellishment of the self with good character and salvation practices, here analogized to “heavenly ornaments.” The *self* became the center of Thānvī’s revivalist efforts, for he took seriously the demands of modern individualism. He was especially concerned about women’s personal religiosity, for he believed women to be responsible for transmitting traditional values to the next generation of Muslims. I discuss Thānvī’s focus on the feminine in greater detail in the chapter titled, “The Drama of Domesticity.”

The drama of domesticity is important for understanding Thānvī’s biographical details. One of the most transformative experiences of Thānvī’s life, which Muhammad Qasim Zaman describes as a “spiritual crisis,” unfolded in the context of domesticity. Zaman compares Thānvī’s spiritual crisis to that of the medieval polymath Ghazālī (1058-1111), after which the great theologian abandoned institutional forms of piety for ascetic styles of wayfaring. My close reading of Ghawrī’s discussion of this crisis demonstrates that the primary theater of Thānvī’s spiritual upheaval was the psyche and not the intellect. His spiritual turmoil was not about a crisis of epistemological categories. Instead, it was about a crisis of affective tendencies. This is where the feminine enters the picture: women were carriers of affect for Thānvī. On my reading, it was the *feminine response to loss* that provoked Thānvī’s spiritual crisis.

Thānvī experienced a season of spiritual tribulation when he moved to Thana Bhawan. His newfound solitude exacerbated his “intimacy with the divine” (*uns*). For many *ṣūfīs*, the spiritual experience of intense intimacy was often followed by

“existential alienation” (*wahsha*).⁷⁹ As Ghawrī reported: “Intimacy with the divine overwhelmed him and he felt a strong sense of alienation from his relatives, friends, and acquaintances.”⁸⁰ Thānvī contemplated abandoning Thana Bhawan and settling in an isolated area. He sought Gangohī’s advice regarding his desire for greater solitude. The latter luminary advised him against total desertion of social life, suggesting that he cut back his interactions with people instead of relocating to a more remote place. Thānvī’s condition became calmer until a sudden outburst of sorrow and anxiety challenged him to the core of his being.

What was this spiritual crisis? According to Ghawrī, a family death triggered this sudden attack of anxiety. I quote Ghawrī’s narration of the story:

This episode began when a group of farmers murdered his wife’s uncle [her maternal aunt’s husband] in Charthawal [a village near the North Indian city of Muzzafarnagar]...As soon as they heard about this tragedy, Mawlānā Thānvī and his wife rushed to join their grieving family in Charthawal. Mawlānā Thānvī oversaw the uncle’s funeral rituals and washed his mutilated body. The terrifying image of the deceased man’s maimed flesh wounded Mawlānā Thānvī’s tender and sensitive heart. He nonetheless remained composed while performing the funeral rituals. Things changed after he buried the corpse and returned to the deceased’s house. He sat in the threshold foyer (*dihlīz*) of the house, from where he heard the shrieking sounds of women’s wailing and mourning. These sounds triggered Mawlānā Thānvī’s severe heartache and bodily unease and he shuddered with fear.⁸¹

⁷⁹ The early ṣūfī saint Junayd of Baghdad reportedly attributed the sadness experienced by the ṣūfī to “the time of an expansion (*baṣṭ*) which brings on a contraction (*qabḍ*), or the time of an intimacy (*uns*) which brings on an estrangement (*wahsha*)” (Quoted in Jawid A. Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The ṭabaqāt genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī* [Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001], 28).

⁸⁰ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ*, 1:239.

⁸¹ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ*, 1:242-243.

Not every psychological disturbance produces quivering movements. The latter symptom occurs due to anxiety, which usually involves a bodily manifestation.⁸² Anxiety prompts a protruding of affect from the psychic onto the somatic. While the event that triggers anxiety is often arbitrary and cannot be identified as its cause, this event reveals a great deal about the limits of self-composure (sovereignty). The actual causes of psychic formations are always unclear, although talking and analyzing can catch some causal fragments.⁸³ It is important, therefore, to avoid conclusive statements about the latent sources of Thānvī's anxiety. We can say, however, that the feminine affective expressions of sorrow—which might have figured for Thānvī weeping meditations on being and nothingness—were powerful enough to trigger this episode of anxiety. This psychosomatic formation did not end after a few hours. According to Ghawrī, the anxiety lasted for a year and was accompanied by ideas and images that threatened Thānvī's orthodox beliefs and convictions.

Ghawrī shed further light on this brief but vital interlude, during which Thānvī quit teaching students and counselling disciples. The biographer explained that the ṣūfī master's sporadic anxiety was in part provoked by his intense longing for the divine: a craving satiated only by eventual communion with God after death.⁸⁴ Ghawrī narrated:

⁸² For more on this understanding of anxiety, see Sigmund Freud, "Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 20.

⁸³ In pure speculative terms, this psychological and psychic state of affairs could also be read as the "return of the repressed." Thānvī mourned his repression of Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh's eclectic mysticism after he had accepted Gangohī's scriptural mysticism. The family deaths coupled with feminine mourning were intense affective experiences that brought out in the form of anxiety Thānvī's earlier, but now repressed, affective attachment to tradition. Thānvī resolved this anxiety by settling down with a *nomos*-centered understanding of tradition. Yet, the eclectic mysticism of Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh haunted Thānvī, and in the years to come, especially after the deaths of Gangohī, he approvingly cited and affirmed Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh's style of inhabiting the mystical tradition.

⁸⁴ Another source of his anxiety could have been his reading of Ibn 'Arabi. Thānvī reported that he would encounter certain sayings of Ibn 'Arabī that would put him in a state of bewilderment (*tawahhush*)

“He was anxious to the extent that even suicide crossed his mind, as he himself reported, ‘Once a friend came to visit me during these turbulent days. He was carrying a loaded rifle. I fancied telling him to terminate my disgraced existence by means of his rifle’.”⁸⁵ This statement reflected a nihilistic embrace of physical death and a sense of unpleasure, which often followed anxiety according to Freud. While Ghawrī used the word, “suicide” (*khudkushī*), to characterize these thoughts, a more appropriate would have been “despondency” (*be-kasī*). Thānvī’s desire to become an instance of nothingness was not original; it was a long-established rhetorical trope within Islamic mysticism.

How did Thānvī deal with this crisis? He wrote to his mentors, Gangohī and Imdād Allāh, two savants who had walked on similar paths before him. Gangohī invoked the memory of past saints in his reply to Thānvī:

Your trepidation is praiseworthy if it concerns the afterlife. Our saints experienced great feelings of contraction because of trepidation and some even died due to this intense feeling...Your condition should occasion gratitude instead of sorrow. Imām Ghazālī, may God bless his soul, endured similar trepidation for a decade in Jerusalem. Even notable physicians admitted defeat when it came to curing his sorrows and worries. At last, a Jewish physician offered a sound diagnosis. He said that the great sage did not suffer from bodily ailment but from eschatological fear, for which no treatment was to be found. You should rejoice that God the Most High has gifted you with this condition [of trepidation]. Bodily comfort is nothing compared to this feeling of trembling. If this feeling were to kill you, your death would merit martyrdom.⁸⁶

Gangohī did not rely on a surface reading of Thānvī’s condition. On his reckoning, psychosomatic anxiety about the afterlife was a gift of God. Imdād Allāh’s letter was

and contraction (*inqibāḍ*). He would not complete his research and writing on the medieval saint’s theological mysticism, as carrying on would have exposed him to an “unlimited difficulty of the heart” (*qalb ko be-ḥadd taklīf*) (Thānvī, *Al-Tanbīh al-ṭarabī*, 2).

⁸⁵ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*, 1:243.

⁸⁶ Muḥammad ‘Āshiq Ilāhī Mīrathī, *Makātīb-i Rashīdiyya*, ed. Maḥmud Ashraf ‘Usmānī (Lahore: Idāra-yi Islāmiyyat, 1996), 60-61.

equally comforting: “The condition of your heart is commendable. Your current spiritual station is characterized by feelings of fear and hope (*khawf wa rajā*). This station is otherwise known as dread and intimacy (*haybat wa uns*). Your heart will oscillate between these two tendencies, but you should know that both feelings express a single spiritual reality.”⁸⁷ The master encouraged him to continue treading the spiritual path, for a greener patch awaited him in the future. The trepidation waned within a year and Thānvī became hopeful, turning away from death toward life.

How did Thānvī make sense of this episode later on in his life? Retrospectively, he appreciated the sorrow and feelings of contraction that characterized this time period. He explained that loss of grounding and uncertainty entailed numerous advantages and benefits, which he summarized into seven points. First, one who had endured these psychic pangs escaped hubris. Second, these conditions made one apprehensive about one’s theoretical and practical capacities. Third, one gained the experience needed to dispel satanic thoughts and acquired the ability to identify companionship that was harmful for the seeker’s spiritual wellbeing. Fourth, undergoing these psychosomatic experiences prepared one for future attacks of anxiety, including feelings of dread on the deathbed. Fifth, such experiences refined one’s mystical discernment and enabled one to diagnose spiritual ailments. Sixth, these occurrences made one hopeful for God’s mercy, for surviving them revealed God’s saving grace. Seventh, these experiences taught one that salvation lay not in one’s good works, but in God’s forgiveness alone.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Thānvī, *Maktubāt-i Imdādiyya*, 51-52.

⁸⁸ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*, 1:272.

This spiritual crisis was followed by four decades of intense revival and reform activities. Thānvī's accomplishments from 1897 to his death in 1943 were manifold and resist straightforward categorization. In terms of his publications alone, he authored hundreds of treatises about Muslim theology, sacred law, and mysticism. His printed sermons (*khuṭbāt*) numbered more than 330, while his recorded conversations (*malḡūzāt*) totalled around thirty or so bulky volumes (see Appendices II and III for more detail on Thānvī's *khuṭbāt* and *malḡūzāt*, respectively).

Thānvī also served on the executive board of directors (*majlis-i shūrā*) of his alma mater, the Deoband seminary. For many years, Thānvī managed the administrative affairs of his ṣūfī lodge and its *madrassa*. Around 1919, he handed over the administrative responsibilities to his nephew, Shabbīr 'Alī Thānvī, who played a crucial role in publishing and disseminating Thānvī's teaching in colonial North India.⁸⁹ Within a decade or so after his relocation to Thana Bhawan, most Deobandī scholars and thousands of lay devotees recognized Thānvī as one of the leading Muslim savants of British India. The Deoband seminary acknowledged his growing authority, and in 1926 appointed him as its Chancellor (*sarparast*). Thānvī resigned from this position in 1935 due to disagreements about his role and the increasing participation of the seminary's teachers and students in anti-colonial demonstrations.

⁸⁹ Shabbīr 'Alī Thānvī was the son of Akbar 'Alī (who was Thānvī's younger brother). Shabbīr 'Alī was born in 1895 and studied preliminary Arabic and Persian texts with Thānvī. He enrolled at Madrasa Mazāhir al-'Ulūm in Saharanpur, where he studied with Mawlānā 'Abd Allāh Gangohī and Mawlānā Khalīl Aḥmad Saharanpurī. Shabbīr 'Alī studied Ḥadīth with Mawlānā Maḥmūd Ḥasan at the Deoband seminary. Shabbīr 'Alī not only managed Thānvī's ṣūfī lodge and its *madrassa*, but also edited the monthly journals, *Al-Imdād* and *Al-Nūr*, and published his uncle's sermons and tracts. He took an active part in the struggle for Pakistan and migrated to Karachi in 1950. He continued spreading his uncle's teaching in Pakistan, and died in Karachi in 1968 (Muḥammad Akbar Shāh Bukhārī, *Akābir-i 'ulamā'-yi Deoband* [Lahore: Idāra-yi Islāmiyyat, 1999], 255-259).

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, Thānvī travelled extensively throughout colonial India in order to deliver public sermons. He was often accompanied by one of his nephews or a close disciple who served as a scribe for his sermons. Thousands of Muslims attended these sermons. By the early 1930s, Thānvī abandoned sermon-related travel due to physical weakness. By then, his publications and printed sermons circulated throughout South Asia. His impact on the wider Muslim intellectual circles of South Asia can be measured by the fact that by 1940 the leading Muslim historian of colonial South Asia, Sayyid Sulaymān Nadvī, had joined the ranks of Thānvī's disciples.

The Final Years

In the last decade of his life, Thānvī engaged in deep mystical reflection. He also became more committed to Muslim separatism and criticized Hindu-Muslim coalitional politics. His lukewarm approval of the Muslim League encouraged his leading disciples to participate in the Pakistan Movement. Thānvī's disciple Muftī Muḥammad Shafī' and Thānvī's nephews Shabbīr 'Alī Thānvī and Zafar Aḥmad 'Usmānī all authored treatises that explained their master's political positions in terms of sacred law and theology. After the partition of India, many of his disciples migrated to Pakistan where they became active spiritual luminaries and scholars of sacred law. Thānvī did not live to see the partition; he died in 1943 in Thāna Bhawan, leaving behind no children of his own, but over 125 ṣūfī successors (*khulafā'*).⁹⁰

Thānvī's formal ṣūfī successors constituted a significant fellowship of spiritual athletes, piety-minded Muslims, and religious scholars. For a complete list of his formal

⁹⁰ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānīh*, 4:138-144.

successors (*khulafā'*), consult Appendix IV: Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī's Ṣūfī Successors (this appendix also includes short biographical notes on his leading successors). While most of his successors were North Indian Muslims, he trained scores of disciples from present-day Pakistan and Bangladesh to carry forth his teaching. Thānvī's mark on contemporary South Asian Islam—and its diaspora in Southern Africa, the United Kingdom, and North America—emerged in part from his prolific publications and sermons and in part from the institutions and grassroots activities of his formal successors. Thānvī's body and the bodies of his disciples and successors shaped a significant part of contemporary Muslim orthodoxy in South Asia and beyond.

Thānvī's death was a heartfelt tragedy to thousands of Indian Muslims. In his autobiography, the preeminent South Asian Ḥadīth scholar Muḥammad Zakariyya Kāndhlavī (1898-1982) recorded his impressions about this tragedy:

I frequently visited our revered elder, Mawlānā Thānvī, during his final illness. On the morning of 16 Rajab 1362, I was in my scriptorium when brother Ikrām brought me the heartbreaking news. I immediately got up and, locking all doors behind me, ran to the train station. The train was about to leave. I quickly bought a ticket and boarded the moving train to Thāna Bhawan... Mawlānā Zafar Aḥmad 'Usmānī performed the funeral prayers in the same grounds that were used for the 'Īd prayer gathering. Just a few days before his death, Mawlānā Thānvī had moved to the residence of his second wife. He passed away in the night between Monday and Tuesday, at around 10:40. May God enlighten his grave and elevate his ranks. Mawlānā Thānvī had grown weary of this transitory world during his last days. He would remark to God, "Oh Lord! When will I vacate this latrine [worldly life]?"⁹¹

According to Sayyid Sulaymān Nadvī: "Mawlānā Thānvī's pen had brought together sacred law and mysticism into unison after centuries of mutual antagonism between these

⁹¹ Muḥammad Zakariyya Kāndhlavī, *Āp bītī* (Karachi: Ma'had al-Khalīl al-Islāmī, n.d.), 3:103-104.

two disciplines.”⁹² Nadvī lamented Thānvī’s death, which for him closed the epoch of luminaries such as Ḥājī Imdād Allāh, Shaykh Muḥammad Thānvī, Muḥammad Qāsim Nānōtvī, and Muḥammad Ya‘qūb Nānōtvī.

Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī: Genres & Texts

Thānvī was a seasoned scholar of Muslim theology (*‘ilm al-‘aqā’id* and *kalām*), sacred law and legal theory (*fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*), and mysticism (*taṣawwuf*). These three bodies of knowledge constituted the discursive and experiential core of his tradition and colored his everyday realities and concerns. While theology, law, and mysticism comprised of distinctive textual histories, these epistemic formations produced synergetic effects on the scholars and the laity who embodied them. Many South Asian Muslim luminaries before Thānvī had already fused classical Sunnī theology, sacred law, and mysticism into a single religious experience and discourse.⁹³

Thānvī was immersed in classical Sunnī theology, especially in Ash‘arī traditional theology and Māturīdī rational theology. Both theological traditions agreed on the absolute authority of the revealed norms, but differed with respect to the role of reason in interpreting God’s commandments and the Prophet Muḥammad’s teaching. For the Ash‘arīs, revelation alone identified humanity’s moral duties toward God and responsibilities toward other human beings (rational deliberation could nonetheless

⁹² Sayyid Sulaymān Nadvī, *Yād-i raftaghān* (Karachi: Majlis-i Nashriyāt-i Islām, 1983), 253.

⁹³ This trend characterized earlier Muslim jurist-mystics as well. For an illustration of how pre-modern South Asian Muslim scholars straddled mysticism and sacred law, consult this excellent monograph: Amina M. Steinfels, *Knowledge before Action: Islamic Learning and Sufi Practice in the Life of Sayyid Jalāl al-dīn Bukhārī Makhdūm-i Jahāniyān* (Columbia, SC.: University of South Carolina Press, 2012). Another major South Asian saint-cum-scholar who amalgamated mysticism and sacred law was Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624). For more on the latter, see Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi: An Outline of his Thought and a Study of his Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1971]); Fazlur Rahman, *Selected Letters of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1968); Arthur Buehler, *Revealed Grace: The Juristic Sufism of Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624)* (Louisville, KY.: Fons Vitae, 2011).

explain the wisdom behind the revealed norms). The Māturīdīs also upheld the authority of revelation; however, they argued that some moral duties and responsibilities could be demonstrated by natural reason, even if unspecified in revelatory sources.

Māturīdī theology had originated within central Asian Ḥanafism. This theology became prevalent in North Indian Sunnism largely through central Asian connections.⁹⁴ By Thānvī's time, however, many Indian Sunnī scholars had compromised their strict adherence to Māturīdī theology by making concessions to Ash'arī theological positions.⁹⁵ Thānvī inherited and inhabited a mixture of Ash'arī and Māturīdī theologies. Let me provide an example to illustrate the implications of this mixture.

Ash'arī theologians and Māturīdī theologians offered different answers to this question: will “the uncontacted folk,” people who have not received God's message as revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad, attain salvation? Before we read Thānvī's answer, it is important to underscore that according to the Māturīdī position all human beings, irrespective of their exposure to revealed truth, were responsible for believing in the existence of God. The Māturīdīs explained that this basic belief was universal, for it was warranted by natural reason.⁹⁶ Among the critics of this position were latter-day Ash'arīs

⁹⁴ For the relationship between between Ḥanafism and Māturīdism, see the following scholarship: Wilferd Madelung, “The Spread of Māturīdism and the Turks,” in Madelung, *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* (London, 1985); Philipp Bruckmayr, “The Spread and Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām and Underlying Dynamics.” *Iran and the Caucasus* 13 (2009): 59-92.

⁹⁵ Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi played a decisive role in reorienting Indo-Mulsim Sunnī theology to Ash'arism. He claimed full adherence to Ash'arī theology in his treatise, *Khayr-i kathīr* [*Al-Khayr al-kathīr*], trans. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm (Karachi: Dār al-Ishā ‘at, 1992): 270-273.

⁹⁶ The Māturīdīs held that the ability to reason (*‘aql*) alone should necessitate belief in the unity of God, whereas the revealed content of traditional belief required transmission (*naql*). For them, belief in God's unity was universally mandated and required even of those who had never heard about revelation or prophetic message. On the other hand, the Ash'arīs held that *‘aql* alone did not guide one to correct belief, and therefore, those to whom revealed texts have not been transmitted were not required to believe in God. For an account of this difference between the Māturīdīs and the Ash'arīs, see Ibn Kamāl Pāshā, *Masā'il al-ikhtilāf bayn al-Ashā'ira wa al-Māturīdiyya* (Ammān: Dār al-Fatḥ, 2011), 59-62.

as well as the renowned theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (1058-1111). The latter theologian was important to Thānvī, but so was the original Māturīdī position. Thānvī therefore offered an inconclusive answer, one which respected this difference of opinion: “A person not exposed to revelation will be accountable for belief *only* if he did not think about his beliefs himself or upon hearing about matters of faith from those who nurtured authentic beliefs. The theologians have differed with reference to someone whose mind never contemplates belief. Ghazālī, may God’s mercy be upon him, among others, holds that the uncontacted person will attain salvation. And God knows best!”⁹⁷ While Thānvī acknowledged the perspectival difference between the Ash‘arīs and the Māturīdīs on the question of salvation, he elided strict adherence to either side. Yet, he cited Ghazālī, which indicated a departure from doctrinaire Māturīdīsm. Thānvī’s disciple Muḥammad Ṭayyib Qāsimī described Deobandī theology as “Ash‘arī-oriented Māturīdism.”⁹⁸

In terms of sacred law, Thānvī was a strict Ḥanafī jurist who adopted the Mālikī position on women’s right to divorce. The institutionalization of the Ḥanafī School in North India transpired in the thirteenth century.⁹⁹ Over time, North Indian Sunnī theologians staunchly defended the classical and medieval Ḥanafī articulation of Muslim

⁹⁷ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Imdād al-fatāwā*, ed. Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘. 6 vols. (Karachi: Maktaba-i Dār al-‘Ulūm, 2001), 5:398-9. Ghazālī articulated this position in his book, *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayna al-Islām wa’l-zandaqa*, ed. Sulayān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, 1961). For its English translation, see Sherman A. Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s Fayṣal al-Tafriqa Bayna al-Islām wa al-Zandaqa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For a discussion of Ghazālī’s theory of salvation, see Chapter One of Mohammad Hassan Khalil, *Islam and the Fate of Others: The Salvation Question* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁹⁸ Muḥammad Ṭayyib Qāsimī, *‘Ulamā’-i Deoband kā dīnī rukh aur maslakī mizāj* (Lahore: Idāra-yi Islāmiyyat, 1988), 151-173.

⁹⁹ It was in this period that the first voluminous Ḥanafī *fatwa* collection from the Indian subcontinent was authored by Dāwūd b. Yūsuf al-Khaṭīb al-Ḥanafī. The latter jurist titled this collected as *Al-Fatāwā al-Ghiyāthiyya* (in honor of the Delhi Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn Balbān). See Ḥājī Khalīfa, *Kashf al-zunūn ‘an asāmī al-kutub wa’l-funūn* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1982), Volume 4: Column 157.

sacred law.¹⁰⁰ Rarely did Indian jurists permit following the alternative legal schools of Sunnī Islam. Two exceptions to this rule were the Delhi-based polymaths Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm and his celebrated son, Shāh Walī Allāh (1702-1763).¹⁰¹

As discussed above, Thānvī belonged to the Chishtī ṣūfī order, which has been “the most widespread and popular...complex of spiritual practice, historical memory, and ethical models” in South Asia.¹⁰² This order arrived in India when the medieval Muslim mystic, Mu‘īn al-Dīn of Chisht (near present-day Herat, Afghanistan), “came to Rajasthan in the wake of the Ghurid conquest of northern India at the end of the twelfth century.”¹⁰³ Mu‘īn al-Dīn’s disciple, Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī (d. 1236), spread the master’s teaching in North India. The order gained prominence through Quṭb al-Dīn’s disciple Farīd al-Dīn Ganj-i Shakar (1175-1265). The latter’s two disciples, namely Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’ (d. 1325) and ‘Alā al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Ṣābir (d. 1291), founded the two main branches of the Chishtī order: the Nizāmiyya and the Ṣābiriyya. Most renowned Chishtī saints belonged to the Nizāmiyya branch. The major pre-modern saint of the Ṣābiriyya branch was Shāh ‘Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī (ca. 1456-1537). In the nineteenth century, the Ṣābiriyya branch flourished through Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh whose followers included the first-generation luminaries of the Deoband seminary. Although Deobandī scholars belonged to the Ṣābiriyya branch of the Chishtī order, they were

¹⁰⁰ On Ḥanafism in South Asia, see Alan M. Guenther, “Hanafī *Fiqh* in Mughal India: The *Fatawa-i ‘Alamgiri*.” In *India’s Islamic Traditions: 711-1750*, ed. Richard M. Eaton (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003): 209-33; Muḥammad Ishāq Bhattī, *Barr-i saghīr pāk-o hind mein ‘ilm-i fiqh* (Lahore, 1973).

¹⁰¹ Ebrahim Moosa, “Foreword,” In *Shāh Walī Allāh’s Treatises on Islamic Law: Al-Inṣāf fī Bayān Sabab al-Ikhtilāf* and *‘Iqd al-Jīd fī Aḥkām al-Ijtihād wa-l-Taqlīd*, trans. Marcia Hermansen (Louisville, KY.: Fons Vitae, 2010): vii-xxi.

¹⁰² Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, 1.

¹⁰³ Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, 14.

heavily influenced by the jurist-*ṣūfīs* of the Naqshbandiyya order.¹⁰⁴ As Farhan Ahmad Nizami notes, “Deoband came to represent an interesting intermingling of Chishti and Naqshbandi attitudes.”¹⁰⁵ Deobandī mysticism was thus “tempered by a concern to hew to the foundational texts and the recognized norms of their Hanafī school of law.”¹⁰⁶

I have briefly outlined Thānvī’s theological, legal, and mystical genealogies. I now turn to a brief exposition of his major writings. For heuristic purposes, I use the category of genre to structure my discussion of his massive oeuvre. Thānvī’s literary productions belonged to various longstanding and overlapping genres of Islamic scholarship:

- commentary and exegesis (*sharḥ* and *tafsīr*)
- legal response (*fatwā*)
- original composition (*taṣnīf*)
- miscellany (*ta’līf*)
- monograph (*risāla*)
- hagiography (*tazkira*)
- biography (*sīrat* and *sawānīh*)
- correspondence (*maktūbāt*)
- homily and sermon (*mawā’iz* and *khuṭbāt*)—see Appendix II
- recorded conversation (*malfūzāt*)—see Appendix III

These genres of religious scholarship had rich textual histories in South Asian Islam.¹⁰⁷

While Thānvī was steeped in the works of his Indo-Muslim predecessors, he was also well versed in broader Islamicate textual traditions, especially in terms of Muslim

¹⁰⁴ Miyan Jī Nūr Muḥammad, the master of Hājī Imdād Allāh, initiated his disciples into three orders, namely the Chishtiyya, the Qādiriyya, and the Naqshbandiyya (Nizami, “Madrasahs, Scholars, and Saints,” 103). Hājī Imdād Allāh claimed to belong to “eight ‘trees’ (*shajarat*) of spiritual lineage” (Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, 119).

¹⁰⁵ Nizami, “Madrasahs, Scholars, and Saints,” 102.

¹⁰⁶ Zaman, *Ashraf ‘Ali Thanawi*, 21.

¹⁰⁷ The most expansive history of South Asian Islamicate literatures is *Tārīkh-i adabiyāt-i Musalmānān-i Pākistān wa Hind*, eds. ‘Ibādat Barelvī and Sayyid Wazīr al-Ḥasan ‘Ābidī. 20 vols. (Lahore: Punjab University, 1972-1978). Also useful for the pre-colonial period is Annemarie Schimmel, *Islamic Literatures of India* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1973).

theology, sacred law, and mysticism. These genres enabled Thānvī to inhabit different relationships to the scholarly tradition, to participate in myriad intellectual conversations, and to address multiple audiences. He wrote accessible Urdu pamphlets and books for lay audiences and complicated texts laced with Arabic and Persian citations for fellow scholars. It is also true that what counted as “accessible” Urdu prose at the turn-of-the-century daunts current ordinary Urdu readers. Thānvī’s followers have therefore produced several abridged and more accessible versions of his popular books.

Genres perform authorial identities. The autobiography, for example, performs its author’s attention to self-image and self-reflection. In this respect, Thānvī was at once a Qur’ānic exegete (*mufasssīr*), a jurisconsult (*muftī*), an author (*muṣannif*), a ṣūfī theorist (*muḥaqqiq*), and an orator (*wā’iz*). At the same time, he also mixed genres, so that sermons were decorated with Qur’ānic exegesis and ṣūfī hagiography. Because Thānvī generally respected the law of genre, we can use these genres as heuristic devices to frame his incredibly prolific literary production.¹⁰⁸

The commentary is a paradoxical genre. While commentaries signify the authority of their objects (the original texts), they also reveal the dependence of the original text on supplementary annotations and footnotes. In this sense, the commentary identifies the limits of the original text. To put it otherwise, the commentary fulfills the original text’s aspiration for another life. By writing commentaries, Thānvī recognized the authority of the inherited tradition, but also became its mouthpiece and the site of its self-reproduction

¹⁰⁸ For more on genre, see Jacques Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” trans. Avital Ronell. *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (1980): 55-81. See also John Frow, *Genre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

(according to Foucault, commentaries rely on resemblance).¹⁰⁹ In this way, Thānvī wielded immense epistemic authority, even though he merely supplemented canonical texts with annotations.¹¹⁰

Thānvī wrote commentaries on the Qur’ān, the Prophet Muḥammad’s traditions, and works of Persian poetry, such as Rūmī’s *Masnawī*. Thānvī’s exegesis of the Qur’ān, *Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur’ān*, first appeared in 1908.¹¹¹ He published a revised second edition in 1935. Thānvī provided several layers of exegesis on the margins of his Urdu translation, including philological gloss, expositions of legal implications, and a section on mystical insights (independently titled, *Masā’il al-sulūk min kalām malik al-mulūk*).¹¹² In her doctoral dissertation on his voluminous Qur’ān exegesis, Rayḥāna Ziyā Şiddīqī points out that Thānvī interpreted the Muslim scripture according to orthodox Sunnī doctrines.¹¹³ Thānvī’s exegesis showed clear indebtedness to past Sunnī Qur’ān exegetes, especially the Iraqi polymath Maḥmūd Ālūsī (1803-1854).¹¹⁴ Şiddīqī further notes that while his accessible Urdu translation of the Qur’ān reached a lay audience, the technical style of his exegetical annotations presupposed a scholarly audience (many of his annotations were in Arabic).¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 41-42.

¹¹⁰ For a theoretical discussion of the commentary genre in religious studies, see Aaron Hughes, “Presenting the Past: The Genre of Commentary in Theoretical Perspective.” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 15.2 (2003): 148-168, 149.

¹¹¹ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur’ān* (Delhi: Tāj, n.d.).

¹¹² This has been published separately as well. See Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Masā’il-i taṣawwuf Qur’ān kī roshanī mein*, ed. Muḥammad Iqbāl Qurayshī (Lahore: Idāra-yi Islāmiyyat, 1990).

¹¹³ Rayḥāna Ziyā Şiddīqī, *Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī kī Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur’ān kā taḥqīqī wa tanqīdī muḥāla’a* (Delhi: Rayḥāna Ziyā Şiddīqī, 1991), 176.

¹¹⁴ Maḥmūd b. ‘Abd Allāh Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma’ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm wa’l-sab‘ al-mathānī* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1983). Thānvī’s other works on the Qur’ān included *Al-Taḥqīr fī l-tafsīr* (Deoband: Maṭba‘-i Qāsimī, n.d.). The latter treatise was a criticism of his fellow Deobandī theologian Aḥmad ‘Alī Lahorī’s Qur’ān translation.

¹¹⁵ Şiddīqī, *Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī kī Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur’ān*, 176.

For ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī, Thānvī’s *Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur’ān* was “the crown of all Urdu Qur’ān commentaries.”¹¹⁶ While Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib Qāsimī described *Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur’ān* in these words: “It is quite evident that Mawlānā Thānvī was a thorough scholar who, in addition to his command of mystical knowledge, possessed discursive knowledge of all religious sciences. Thus, his exegesis reflects not only mastery of all religious sciences, but also mystical insight and profound vision.”¹¹⁷ Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib Qāsimī also reported that according to his teacher, Mawlānā Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī, “*Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur’ān* is an incredibly thorough commentary that enriches its readers with concise summaries of many preceding works of Qur’ānic exegesis.”¹¹⁸

Thānvī also authored a volume of prophetic traditions that supported Ḥanafī law. This volume became the basis for his nephew Ṣafar Aḥmad ‘Usmānī’s Arabic masterpiece, *I’lā al-sunan (Elevation of the Prophet’s Way)*.¹¹⁹ The latter multi-volume tome collected prophetic traditions in support of all Ḥanafī positions and explained the legal reasoning of the school’s founding figures. In colonial India, *I’lā al-sunan* was one of the many Arabic works produced by Deobandī ‘ulamā’ in their attempts to bolster their communal authority and defend their legal School’s foundations in the prophetic precept (partly in response to criticism from Ahl-i Ḥadīth scholars).

Thānvī’s additional contributions to this genre included an extended commentary on Rumī’s *Masnawī* titled *Kalīd-i Masnawī (The Key to the Masnawī)* and a commentary

¹¹⁶ ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī, *Tafsīr-i Mājidī*. 3 vols. (Karachi: Majlis-i Nashriyāt-i Qur’ān, 1998), 1:18.

¹¹⁷ Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib Qāsimī, *Maktūbāt-i Ḥakīm al-islām*, ed. Mawlānā Shafīq Aḥmad Qāsimī (Multan: Idāra-yi Ta’līfāt-i Ashrafiyya, 2000), 150-151.

¹¹⁸ Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib Qāsimī, *Maktūbāt-i Ḥakīm al-islām*, 150.

¹¹⁹ Ṣafar Aḥmad al-‘Uthmānī al-Tahānawī, *I’lā al-sunan*. 21 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2002).

on the poetry of Ḥāfiẓ titled *ʿIrfān-i Ḥāfiẓ*.¹²⁰ Both commentaries were works of autoimmunity: they claimed to preserve tradition against its own subversive elements. Instead of discarding Rumī, Ḥāfiẓ, and Ibn ʿArabī, Thānvī appropriated these figures in order to make them harmless to orthodoxy. Thānvī’s *Kalīd-i Masnawī*, or parts thereof, first appeared in 1904. Unlike most of his theological and juridical writings, Thānvī did not begin this work with a brief Arabic introduction. In the brief Urdu introduction, Thānvī justified the need for his commentary on the *Masnawī*, claiming that most ordinary readers were prone to take the Persian poet’s metaphors at face value. In this way, he argued that his commentary would save modern readers from apostasy (*ilhād*) and doctrinal infidelity (*zandaqa*).¹²¹

The *fatwā* genre was also a monument to traditional authority. Yet, this genre permitted jurisconsults (*mufītīs*) to showcase their limited critical autonomy. In terms of pedagogy, the *fatwā* was the inverse of the Socratic method. It presupposed the questioner’s ignorance and the jurisconsult’s knowledge. Writing *fatwās* confirmed the jurisconsult’s expertise in sacred law and “knowledge of local customs and colloquial language.”¹²² The publication and proliferation of *fatwā* collections in colonial India reflected that *mufītīs* of the period actively continued the Indo-Muslim commitment to legal creativity within the parameters of the canonical law school (*madhhab*).¹²³ In the

¹²⁰ Ashraf ʿAlī Thānvī, *Kalīd-i Masnawī*. 24 vols. 12 bindings. (Multan: Idāra-yi Taʿlīfat-i Ashrafiyya, n.d.); Ashraf ʿAlī Thānvī, *ʿIrfān-i Ḥāfiẓ: Ḥāfiẓ-i Shīrāzī ke mashhūr wa maqbūl Fārsī Dīvān ke ash ʿār kī ṣūfīyāna wa ʿarifāna Urdu sharḥ* (Karachi: Nafīs Academy, 1976).

¹²¹ Thānvī, *Kalīd-i Masnawī*, 1:2.

¹²² Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick, and David S. Powers, “Muftis, Fatwas, and Islamic Legal Interpretation,” in *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and their Fatwas*, eds. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick, and David S. Powers (Cambridge, MASS. and London: Harvard University Press, 1996),” 23.

¹²³ On the history of *fatwa* collections in South Asia, see Zafarul Islam, “Origin and Development of *Fatāwā*-Compilation in Medieval India.” *Hamdard Islamicus* 20.1 (1997): 7-18.

North Indian context, *fatwā* “denoted an authoritative and accepted opinion of the Ḥanafī school.”¹²⁴

Thānvī authored thousands of *fatāwā* (plural of *fatwā*). The primary repository of these texts was his six-volume *Imdād al-fatāwā*, which included his answers to questions posed by lay Muslims and scholars alike. Muhammad Khalid Masud has meticulously studied this collection and has prepared the following table that provides an overview of *Imdād al-fatāwā*’s contents:

<i>Subject</i>	<i>No. of Fatwas</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Rituals	1,028	30.44
Personal status	945	27.98
Contracts	559	16.56
Marriage and divorce	376	11.13
Exegesis	138	4.08
Creeds and heresiology	116	3.43
Mysticism	96	2.84
Innovations	69	2.04
Judicial procedure	38	1.12
Penal laws	13	0.38
Total	3,378	100.00

The Content of *Imdād al-fatāwā*¹²⁵

While Thānvī’s *fatwā* collection addressed an Urdu readership, it also included a

¹²⁴ Masud, Messick, and Powers, “Muftis, Fatwas, and Islamic Legal Interpretation,” 14.

¹²⁵ Muhammad Khalid Masud, “Apostasy and Judicial Separation in British India,” 198.

few Persian *fatāwā*. Masud explains other formal features of this collection: “Authorities are almost always cited in Arabic...Most of the fatwas are long, giving details of the argument and citing sources. The authorities cited belong largely to the Hanafī school, with frequent references to the Ottoman mufti Ibn ‘Abidin (d. 1836).”¹²⁶ Thānvī’s disciple, Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘, edited the final edition of *Imdād al-fatāwā*. A major jurisconsult in his own right, Muḥammad Shafī‘ added to this collection a brief biography of his ṣūfī master and a reverent preface to the volume. Muḥammad Shafī‘ praised Thānvī’s cautious approach to issuing *fatwās*, noting that Thānvī often consulted with his teachers, senior colleagues, and even junior colleagues before writing replies to controversial questions.¹²⁷

Thānvī authored numerous works of “original composition” (*taṣnīf*) and “compiled composition” (*ta’līf*). The original composition gave considerable freedom to individual authors to experiment with conventional formal and stylistic features, while compiled compositions allowed authors to create miscellanies of sorts. Thānvī was a master practitioner of the *taṣnīf* and *ta’līf* genres. He preferred writing in a systematic manner. Thānvī’s most circulated *ta’līf* was the turn-of-the-century book, *Bihishti zewar* (*Heavenly Ornaments*), a compendium he authored for a female readership.¹²⁸ Barbara D. Metcalf has closely examined this text (and has also produced a partial English translation).¹²⁹ As mentioned above, I analyze this text in the chapter titled, “The Drama

¹²⁶ Masud, “Apostasy and Judicial Separation in British India,” 198-99.

¹²⁷ Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘, “Muqaddima,” in *Imdād al-fatāwā*, 1:13-18.

¹²⁸ Ashraf ‘Ali Thānvī, *Bihishti zewar*.

¹²⁹ Ashraf ‘Ali Thānvī, *Perfecting Women*. The latter’s partial English translation was the culmination of her extensive work on this text. See Barbara D. Metcalf, “Islam and Custom in Nineteenth-Century India: The Reformist Standard of Maulānā Thānawī’s *Bihishti Zewar*,” *Contributions of Asian Studies* 17 (1982): 62-78. A complete English translation had preceded Metcalf’s *Perfecting Women*. See

of Domesticity.”

Thānvī’s disciples analogized his compositions and miscellanies to medicinal cures for lay Muslims’ intellectual and spiritual shortcomings.¹³⁰ Yet, writing had become a daily ritual for him and therefore could have fulfilled his spiritual and psychic needs. We can only speculate if writing was therapeutic or cathartic for him. What is certain is that some of his writings demanded expertise familiarity with disciplines such as sacred law and ṣūfism. While he sometimes addressed these writings to scholarly colleagues, at times he did not define his audience proper or adopted specialized vocabulary within a text written for a lay audience. In these instances, writing became a way for him to inhabit complex discursive traditions in order to address his personal intellectual quests.

As an illustration, I concentrate on a single *taṣnīf*, namely Thānvī’s *Iṣlāḥ-i inqilāb* (*Reforming Change*), in order to understand the sort of teaching and communication enabled by this genre. Replete with analogies to medicine, the book consisted of short essays about personal religiosity and social reform.¹³¹ These essays first appeared in the journal, *Al-Qāsim* (published by Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband). A recent edition modified the title, adding a telling subtitle: *Iṣlāḥ-i inqilāb-i ummat: har shu‘ba-yi zindagī mein musalmāno ke bighār kī tashkhīṣ aur uskā ‘ilāj* (*Reforming the Changing Ways of Muslim Society: The Diagnosis and Remedy of Muslim Decay in All Branches of Life*).¹³² *Iṣlāḥ-i inqilāb* argued that contemporary Indo-Muslim culture had changed for the worse: it had

Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Bahishti zewar: Heavenly Ornaments: Complete Twelve Parts*, trans. Muhammad Masroor Khan Saroha and Mohammad Abdullah (Delhi: Dini Book Depot, 1982).

¹³⁰ Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘, “Muqaddima,” in *Imdād al-fatāwā*, 13.

¹³¹ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Iṣlāḥ-i inqilāb* (Deoband: Idārah-yi Ta’līfāt-i Awlīyā’, 1972).

¹³² Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Iṣlāḥ-i inqilāb-i ummat: har shu‘ba-yi zindagī mein musalmāno ke bighār kī tashkhīṣ aur us kī ‘ilāj* (Karachi: Idārat al-Ma‘ārif, 1998).

become morally corrupt. “This change,” argued Thānvī, “is a spiritual ailment (*marẓ-i rūḥānī*).”¹³³ This change affected the following personal and social elements of Muslim society: beliefs (*‘aqā’id*), rituals of piety (*dayānāt*), transactions (*mu‘āmalāt*), social decorum (*mu‘āsharat*), and character (*akhlāq*).¹³⁴ The various chapters of the book addressed these elements of religiosity. Thānvī devoted a large section of the book to marriage reform and women’s issues.

Thānvī’s *taṣnīf* works also included rational expositions of the divine norms, especially the tract, *Maṣāliḥ al-‘aqliyya lil-aḥkām al-naqliyya* (*The Divine Norms in Light of Reason*).¹³⁵ His explicitly theological treatises included *Furū‘ al-īmān* (*The Branches of Belief*), *Ḥifẓ al-īmān* (*Safeguarding of Belief*), and *Islām aur ‘aqliyāt* (*Islam and the Rational Sciences*).¹³⁶

The monograph (*risāla*) had a long history in Muslim religious literature. This genre enabled the Muslim scholar to concentrate on a single issue, reflecting and debating a single question from multiple perspectives. Most of Thānvī’s monographs (*rasā’il*) were incredibly brief treatises (some were only two to three pages long). At times, he transformed a lengthy *fatwā* into a *risāla*, and published it in *Al-Nūr*, the regular journal-type publication of his ṣūfī lodge. The most extensive collection of Thānvī’s single-topic treatises was *Bawādir al-nawādir* (*Harbingers of Literary Rarities*).¹³⁷ *Bawādir al-nawādir* was an extensive repository of Thānvī’s honed knowledge. The collection

¹³³ Thānvī, *Iṣlāḥ-i inqilāb-i ummat*, 19.

¹³⁴ Thānvī, *Iṣlāḥ-i inqilāb-i ummat*, 17.

¹³⁵ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Al-Maṣāliḥ al-‘aqliyya lil-aḥkām al-naqliyya* (Lahore: Kutub Khāna Jamīlī, 1964). For its English translation, see Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *The Wisdom Behind the Commands of Islam*, trans. Rafīq Abdur Rehman (Karachi: Dar al-Isha‘at, 1999).

¹³⁶ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Furū‘ al-īmān* (Delhi: Tāj Company, n.d.); Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Ḥifẓ al-īmān* (Deoband: Dār al-Kitāb, n.d.); Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Islām aur ‘aqliyāt*, ed. Mawlānā Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Khān Bijnawī (Lahore: Idāra-yi Islāmiyyat, 1994).

¹³⁷ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Bawādir al-nawādir* (Lahore: Idāra-yi Islāmiyyāt, 1985).

included brief monographs on questions such as: the rights of parents, the use of modern technology in Muslim rituals, the ontological reality of the divine Throne, the meaning of the Prophet Muḥammad’s primordial light, the distinction between passion and lust, the concept of mediation, and an assessment of the Āghā Khānīs.

To Thānvī’s credit, he was able to navigate multiple worlds. He operated at the threshold of mysticism, sacred law, and theology in terms of discourses. He was versatile in poetic and prose expression and inhabited diverse thinking styles such as reason and imagination. He was also a gifted reader of the medieval mystical masters, appreciating their subtle and explicit use of literary devices and tropes. He approached texts with nuance and was amenable to contextualizing statements. This was especially explicit in his moderate defense of the medieval Spanish mystic, Ibn ‘Arabī, in a treatise titled *Al-Tanbīh al-ṭarabī fī tanzīh Ibn al-‘Arabī* (*The Delightful Caveat in the Elevation of Ibn ‘Arabī*).¹³⁸ This text showcased Thānvī’s honed hermeneutical skills, especially as he sorted out an archive wrought with controversy.¹³⁹ Thānvī’s reading of Ibn ‘Arabī was

¹³⁸ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Al-Tanbīh al-ṭarabī fī tanzīh Ibn al-‘Arabī* (Thana Bhawan: Ashraf al-Maṭābi’, 1927). The chapters of *Al-Tanbīh al-ṭarabī* were divided in the following manner: Chapter 1: “The orientation (*maslak*) of the ṣūfīs in relation to the revealed sciences (*‘ulūm shar‘iyya*). Chapter 2: “The testaments of high-ranking Muslim luminaries about Ibn ‘Arabī.” Chapter 3: “The ideal attitude regarding the ṣūfīs and the mystical sciences (*‘ulūm-i taṣawwuf*).” Chapter 4 consisted of alternative sayings of Ibn ‘Arabī that contradicted the problematic sayings attributed to him. In the conclusion, Thānvī stated his personal position on Ibn ‘Arabī. Forthcoming from Jawad Qureshi is an excellent article on Thānvī’s relationship with Ibn ‘Arabī, tentatively titled, “Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* in the Deobandī *maslak*: Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī’s *al-Ḥall al-aqwam li ‘aqd Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*.”

¹³⁹ In this text’s introduction, Thānvī acknowledged how Ibn ‘Arabī’s legacy included both loyal disciples and harsh critics. For some, Ibn ‘Arabī’s positions directly opposed the revealed norms (*sharī‘a*). These critics thus claimed that the mystic was misguided. Yet others considered him a leading spiritual luminary of Islam. Those who celebrated Ibn ‘Arabī nonetheless were at pains to explain some of his more problematic statements. Thānvī claimed that such disciples of the saint deployed two strategies to exonerate him: they either denied the authenticity of the problematic statements or they mitigated the tension between orthodoxy and Ibn ‘Arabī’s mysticism by recourse to interpretation (*ta’wīl*). For Thānvī, interpretation was the ideal strategy to salvage the medieval saint’s legacy and teaching. He explained that the saint’s statements belonged to the discursive category of “gnostic knowledge” (*‘ulūm mukāshafa*) and that none of Ibn ‘Arabī’s statements contradicted “practical matters” (*‘ulūm mu‘āmalā*). With these remarks, Thānvī

shaped by the writings of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. Aḥmad al-Sha‘rānī (d. 1565).¹⁴⁰ Thānvī summed up his position on Ibn ‘Arabī: “I am entirely convinced of Ibn ‘Arabī’s legitimacy and sainthood. This assessment agrees with the testimonies of a significant number of Muslim luminaries.”¹⁴¹ In conclusion, Thānvī employed hermeneutical tact regarding Ibn ‘Arabī’s legacy:

Concerning most of Ibn ‘Arabī’s insights, which belong to the genre of esoteric secrets and are therefore beyond my intellectual comprehension, I neither recommend their affirmation (keeping in mind the Qur’ānic injunction, ‘Pursue not that of which you have no knowledge’ [Qur’ān 17:36]), nor do I recommend their refutation (keeping in mind the Qur’ānic verse, ‘Nay, they reject that of which they have no comprehensive knowledge’ [Qur’ān 10:39]). Moreover, I consider it harmful to investigate and propagate esoteric teachings without a normatively-sanctioned necessity (*ẓarūrat-i shar‘iyya*), following the Qur’ānic verse, ‘As for those in whose hearts is perversity, they follow ambiguity, desiring dissension, and desiring free interpretation’ (Qur’ān, 3:7). Ibn ‘Arabī’s sayings do not yield tranquillity and peace of mind for me, but this is a matter of personal taste. I thus do not concentrate on his teaching, as the Prophet instructs us, “Reject sources of uncertainty and act on certain sources” (reported by Tirmidhī)...In this whole matter, I find myself in agreement with the great reviver of the first Islamic millennium, Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, whose sound positions are to be found in his letters...Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī critically debates with Ibn ‘Arabī’s statements and positions. This was surely becoming of the great reviver, for he was a discerning saint (*muḥaqqiq*) and a recipient of divine disclosure (*sāhib-i kashf*). However, we do not occupy such an elevated position [and are unworthy of quarrelling with Ibn ‘Arabī].¹⁴²

Earlier in this chapter, we read about Thānvī’s zeal for Ibn ‘Arabī during his second Meccan retreat (*ca.* 1893). Later on in his life, however, as the above passage indicates, Thānvī’s zeal for the Spanish mystic had been displaced by a hermeneutics of caution.

first furnished his readers with the archival context in which his intervention could be appreciated (Thānvī, *Al-Tanbīh al-ṭarabī*, 1).

¹⁴⁰ Thānvī cited from ‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. Aḥmad al-Sha‘rānī, *Al-Yawāqīt wa’l-jawāhir fī bayān ‘aqā’id al-akābir* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifāt lil-Ṭibā‘at wa’l-nashr, 1974).

¹⁴¹ Thānvī, *Al-Tanbīh al-ṭarabī*, 147.

¹⁴² Thānvī, *Al-Tanbīh al-ṭarabī*, 147-8.

The above citation perfectly summarizes how Thānvī approached the legacy of Muslim mystics who inhabited the margins of normative and orthodox teaching. He also employed a hermeneutics of caution in his biographical and hagiographical texts on Muslim saintly figures.

The textual homage to saintly and scholarly figures enabled orthodox scholars to bring the past into the present, to experience and embody the pleasure of remembering memorialized charisma. This genre was known as *tazkira* (hagiographical commemoration) and *sawānīḥ* (biography, but literally “occurrences”). South Asian Muslims have amassed a wide-ranging body of hagiographical texts on the Prophet Muḥammad, his Companions, the early Muslim saints, medieval Indo-Muslim luminaries, early modern scholars and mystics, and modern holy men and women. As two astute critics have argued, these texts were “memorative communications,” performing two simultaneous functions: they documented the traffic of divine grace between past authorities and present followers and they reflected “a collective testimony for others who also locate themselves in the same subcommunity of South Asian Muslims.”¹⁴³ While Thānvī authored many texts in this genre, his most striking contributions were original works about his spiritual master, Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh. These texts included *Karāmāt-i Imdādiyya* (*The Minor Miracles of Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh*), *Imdād*

¹⁴³ Marcia K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence, “Indo-Persian Tazkiras as Memorative Communications,” in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, eds. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 150.

al-mushtāq ilā ashraf al-akhlāq (*The Reinforcement of Yearning toward Noble Character*), and *Kamālāt-i Imdādiyya* (*The Perfections of Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh*).¹⁴⁴

The contents of Thānvī's *Kamālāt-i Imdādiyya* reveal how he understood the *tazkira* genre. Before addressing the details about his ṣūfī master, Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh, Thānvī presented to his readership a long Persian poem that starts with Adam's praise, lauds major biblical figures, eulogizes the Prophet Muḥammad, remembers the Companions, and continues forth with praise for latter-day Muslim saints. In the Urdu introduction, he writes, "I present before you the following Qur'ānic verses as proof-texts for the fact that remembering the lives and times of God's chosen few is indeed a praiseworthy task and a beneficial activity: 'And remember in the Book Mary' [Qur'ān 19:16]; 'And remember in the Book Abraham' [Qur'ān 19:41]; 'And remember in the Book Moses' [Qur'ān 19:51]..."¹⁴⁵ Thānvī thus saw his act of recollecting the memories of Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh as fulfilling the Qur'ānic injunction to remember prophetic and saintly figures whose lives contain morals and parables for others.

Thānvī explained that *tazkiras* assisted one in "traveling toward the divine" (*dhahāb ila Allāh*). Studying the works of this genre also helped one erase self-pride (*'ujb*) and to avoid traveling on routes that lead to self-destruction (*ghawā'il-i nafs*). Moreover, these works helped one gain correct understanding, solve intellectual quandaries, and dispel wrong ideas (*ghalt khayalāt*).¹⁴⁶ Because the works of this genre

¹⁴⁴ Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Imdād al-mushtāq ilā ashraf al-akhlāq* (Lahore: Islāmī Kutub Khāna, n.d.); Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Kamālāt-i Imdādiyya* (Lahore: Maktabat al-Furqān, n.d.). For a discussion of *Karāmāt-i Imdādiyya*, see Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, 120-21.

¹⁴⁵ Thānvī, *Kamālāt-i Imdādiyya*, 4.

¹⁴⁶ Thānvī, *Kamālāt-i Imdādiyya*, 4.

are so beneficial, Muslim sages have “always made effort to compile them.”¹⁴⁷

The *tazkira* genre relied heavily on another genre, namely, the recorded daily conversations of saints (*malḡūḡāt*). The pages of *tazkiras* gathered various aphoristic and anecdotal sayings of saints into an extended witnessing of embodied piety and charisma. Thānvī explained that the sayings of contemporary saints were especially conducive for “reviving the heart” and “disciplining the self,” for contemporary readers shared temporal and relational affinities with the saints of their own age.¹⁴⁸

In *Kamālāt-i Imdādiyya*, Thānvī recorded 117 sayings and descriptions of Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh. Each entry was called *kamāl*, or “perfection.” Moreover, each saying or description recorded a “memorable event” (*wāqi‘a*), which together constituted the “perfections” (*kamālāt*) of Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh. Thānvī paraphrased and annotated his master’s *malḡūḡāt*. He concluded the book with a long poem (*ghazal*) in Persian that he described as a “tumultuously evocative” (*shorosh anghayz*) composition aimed to “stir desire and longing for the spiritual path.”¹⁴⁹

Thānvī also penned numerous works commemorating the life and teaching of the Prophet Muḡammad. These works aimed to induce in his readership “love for the Prophet,” which he claimed was one of the “rights of the Prophet Muḡammad” (*ḡuḡūq al-nabī*). In *Nashr al-ṡīb fī dhikr al-nabī al-ḡabīb* (*Dissemination of Musk: Remembering the Beloved Prophet*), Thānvī employed Qur’ānic verses, ḡadīth reports, sayings of scholars, rational elucidations, and poetry (especially passages from al-Būḡīrī’s *Burdah*),

¹⁴⁷ Thānvī, *Kamālāt-i Imdādiyya*, 4.

¹⁴⁸ Thānvī, *Kamālāt-i Imdādiyya*, 4.

¹⁴⁹ Thānvī, *Kamālāt-i Imdādiyya*, 5.

in order to elaborate the various modes of loving the Prophet.¹⁵⁰ Thānvī claimed that reading, studying, and discussing this text would produce in the hearts of readers the profound and reverential knowledge needed for loving the Prophet. This love, in turn, would inspire the believer to emulate the Prophet and follow his teaching and example (*sunna*). This type of mimesis justified the believer's hope for receiving the Prophet's intercession on the Day of Judgment. For Thānvī, *dhikr al-nabī* served two separate, yet connected purposes: it triggered the “praise—love—obedience” sequence of cause and effect and it fulfilled one of the inherent rights of the Prophet.

Dissemination of Musk: Remembering the Beloved Prophet was Thānvī's contribution to the larger discussion about the role of prophetic figures in human history. Muslims and Hindus in colonial India debated heroes and hero-worship, especially given the popularity of Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) and the historical paradigm of “great men” in the intellectual circles of British India.¹⁵¹ Such debates were active in colonial India where Muslim thinkers often had to defend the image of Muḥammad in the context of inter-religious polemic. In this time period, many Muslims authors wrote on the Prophet Muḥammad's life and teaching. As Wilfred Cantwell Smith points out, more biographies of “Muḥammad appeared in every one of the years between the two World Wars than in any one of the centuries between the twelfth and the nineteenth” in India.¹⁵²

Numerous collections of correspondence documented Thānvī's committed engagement with disciples on issues of doctrine, mystical experience, ritual, and

¹⁵⁰ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Nashr al-ṭīb fī dhikr al-nabī al-ḥabīb* (Karachi: Dār al-Ishā‘at, n.d.).

¹⁵¹ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: James Fraser, 1841). The book was translated into South Asian languages as well.

¹⁵² Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Modern Islam in India* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1972 [1946]), 65.

everyday ethical embodiment. The foremost of these collections was the three-volume *Tarbiyat al-sālik* (*Tutelage of the Seeker*). This text excised biographical details of Thānvī's disciples, as many of the questions included personal details. I analyse a few epistles from this collection in the chapter titled, "The Scene of Sublimation." Three other collections of correspondence deserve mention here given their availability in post-colonial South Asia: Mawlānā Hājī Muḥammad Sharīf's *Maktūbāt-i Ashrafīyya*; Muftī Muḥammad Shafī's *Makātīb-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*; Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥayy 'Ārifī's *Ashraf al-Maktūbāt*.¹⁵³

My brief overview of Thānvī's writings has been illustrative rather than exhaustive. Thānvī's successor, 'Abd al-Ḥayy 'Ārifī, wrote a massive tome on the master's literary accomplishments.¹⁵⁴ 'Ārifī documented extensive bibliographical information about Thānvī's hundreds of books, which have become his greatest living legacy and a monument to "religious knowledge" in South Asian Islam. The next chapter shows how "religious knowledge" entailed both episteme and epistemology in colonial South Asian Muslim orthodoxy.

¹⁵³ Mawlānā Hājī Muḥammad Sharīf, *Maktūbāt-i Ashrafīyya* (Multan: Idāra-yi Ta'lifāt-i Ashrafīyya, 1982); Muftī Muḥammad Shafī, *Makātīb-i Ḥakīm al-ummat* (Karachi: Idārat al-Ma'ārif, 1996); Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥayy 'Ārifī, *Ashraf al-maktūbāt* (Karachi: Idārat al-Qur'ān wa'l-'Ulūm al-Islāmiyya, 2000).

¹⁵⁴ Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥayy 'Ārifī, *Fihrist-i Ta'lifāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat* (Karachi: Maktaba-yi Dār al-'Ulūm Karachi, 2007).

Chapter 2. The Production of Knowledge: Moral Responsibility and Gnostic Insight

The theme of knowledge (*‘ilm*) is one of the most dramatic facets of the Islamic scholarly tradition.¹ In colonial South Asian Muslim orthodoxy, *‘ilm* served as the bedrock for the elaboration of Muslim subjectivity and sociality. *‘Ilm* marked the beginning and the end of a Muslim’s life and the gamut of devotional ideas and actions in between. Intellectual debates within Muslim orthodoxy addressed epistemological questions: What does it mean to know something? Does knowledge necessitate action? What type of knowledge is obligatory? What is the most certain method of knowing? Can we know God the way we know other things?

Thānvī’s answers to these questions, which I discuss in this chapter, also broached a range of related concerns and claims. First, his definition of knowledge demonstrated orthodoxy’s commitment to epistemic exclusivism, for orthodox scholars reduced knowledge (*‘ilm*) to “religious knowledge” (*‘ilm-i dīn*). Second, religious knowledge was both an episteme (a body of knowledge) and an epistemology (a way of knowing). Scholars such as Thānvī thus drew on different epistemic and epistemological resources within the Islamic discursive tradition in order to delineate an authentic course of thought and action for the colonial Muslim. Third, these two sides of *‘ilm*—episteme and epistemology—answered various demands imposed by colonial modernity on Muslim orthodoxy, especially the demand to acquire “modern knowledge.” Fourth, the orthodox definition of *‘ilm* as “religious knowledge” was staged through debate and internal

¹ As the acclaimed orientalist Franz Rosenthal put it, “*‘ilm* is one of those concepts that have dominated Islam and given Muslim civilization its distinctive shape and complexion. In fact, there is no other concept that has been operative as a determinant of Muslim civilization in all its aspects to the same extent as *‘ilm*” (Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*, with an Introduction by Dmitri Gutas [Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007], 2).

struggle with other Muslim ideologues, especially Muslim modernists. This chapter explores various concerns and claims about knowledge (*‘ilm*) using the concept of *‘ilm-i dīn*, which gives us a panoramic view of the discursive life of Muslim orthodoxy in colonial India.

The Epistemic Aura of Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī

The 1960 entry on Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* used the following three descriptors to introduce its subject: scholar, theologian, and *ṣūfī*.² According to this formulation, Thānvī inhabited multiple traditions of knowledge production and consumption. These traditions addressed God, self, and the world through theological speculation, mystical practice, and legal scholarship. While these epistemic and experiential configurations were not mutually exclusive, they merged together in late colonial India to serve specific historical purposes. For orthodox Muslim scholars, these disciplinary configurations constituted “knowledge of religion” (*‘ilm-i dīn*). In Thānvī’s teaching, *‘ilm-i dīn* was a complex concept, for it simultaneously connoted a type of knowledge (cognitive content) and a way of knowing (epistemology). Thānvī argued that *‘ilm-i dīn* alone was true knowledge and real knowing, a bold claim through which he counterpunched the Muslim modernist emphasis on secular education. In this way, Thānvī elaborated *‘ilm-i dīn* as an alternative to the European Enlightenment.

² A.S. Bazmee Ansari authored the entry on Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī in the second edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1960). Bazmee introduced Thānvī in the following words: “An eminent scholar, theologian, and *ṣūfī*, who led a very busy life, teaching, preaching, writing, lecturing, and making occasional journeys. A prolific writer, his works exceed one thousand in number. These are mostly on *tafsīr* [Qur’ānic exegesis], *ḥadīth*, logic, *kalām* [rational theology], *‘akā’id* [creed], and *taṣawwuf* [Sūfism].” Bazmee Ansari, A.S. “Ashraf ‘Alī.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2014. DUKE UNIVERSITY. 10 September 2014.

In British India, Muslim scholars could not rely on state patronage after the demise of the Mughal Empire and the waning of Muslim princedoms. Muslim rulers were no longer there to legitimize the social relevance of the Islamic scholarly enterprise. The emergent Muslim public of colonial India filled this void. Ordinary Muslims debated the significance of religious scholars, especially in a context where print technologies enabled autodidactic forms of religious learning.³ Orthodox scholars therefore increasingly encouraged lay Muslims to learn their religion from the experts. These scholars also secured their communal authority by using print media to disseminate their interpretations of Islamic doctrines and rituals. They exhorted lay Muslims to attain salvation by embodying their brand of Islam. In a world where religious ideas, narratives, and rituals came to resemble market commodities, scholars exercised the authority of production and ordinary Muslims wielded the authority of consumption. It was in this context that scholars bundled up varied epistemic configurations, especially institutional *ṣūfism* and legal scholarship. They fashioned themselves as *ṣūfīs* and jurists in order to acquire intellectual capital and procure financial assets. While their elaboration and embodiment of *ṣūfism* and sacred law made orthodox *ṣūfī*-jurists effective social actors, this fusion of multiple discourses also colored their self-image and self-understanding.

I use the expression, “double-embodiment,” to signify how the bodies of *ṣūfī*-jurists performed the demands of the twin discourses of sacred law and mysticism.⁴ The

³ For more on the impact of print technology on Islam in colonial India, see Francis Robinson, “Islam and the Impact of Print in South Asia.” In *Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia: Essays on Education, Religion, History, and Politics*, ed. Nigel Crook (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997): 62-97.

⁴ I have used this expression in relation to what W.E.B. Dubois refers to as “double-consciousness.” However, consciousness per se was not at stake for *Thānvī*. What really mattered was the disciplining of the body, which included the notion of consciousness.

concept of double-embodiment characterized Deobandī and Barelvī forms of Muslim orthodoxy in colonial India. Both Thānvī and his Barelvī counterpart, the renowned Aḥmad Razā Khān Barelvī (1856-1921), were ṣūfīs *and* Ḥanafī jurists. These scholars authored voluminous works of legal responsa *and* treatises on ṣūfī theory and technique.⁵ Their double-embodiment did not imply, however, that their intellectual formation was restricted to ṣūfism and sacred law. In fact, orthodox religious training included instruction in Arabic and Persian philology, Greek logic, Persian metaphysics, Qur’ān exegesis, and the art of rhetoric and oratory. I use double-embodiment to emphasize how ṣūfī-jurists inscribed themselves in the dual realms of the corporeal and the spiritual.

Thānvī exemplified double-embodiment. He used the twin spatial categories of subjective experience (interiority/*bāṭin* and exteriority/*ẓāhir*) in order to make sense of his ordinary structures of feeling and contexts of ideological attachment. He was attuned to the complex drama between the soulful body and heteronomy. The law of the divine Other was important for him, for it alone made possible personal transformation and authentic mystical experience. With the knowledge of ṣūfism and sacred law, Thānvī disciplined the body—its limbs and its affective inclinations. The disciplined Muslim body was at once enmeshed in projects of world-making and projects of transcendence. The knowledge of religion—*‘ilm-i dīn*—was cognitive content and epistemology situated within these designs of embodiment. Orthodox figures such as Thānvī survived modernity with the crutches of *‘ilm-i dīn*.

⁵ Aḥmad Razā Khān Barelvī, *Al-‘Aṭāyā’ al-nabawīyya fī l-Fatāwā al-Riḍwīyya* [*Fatāwā-i Riḍwīyya*]. 30 vols. (Lahore: Razā Foundation, 2006); Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Imdād al-fatāwā*, ed. Muṭī Muḥammad Shafī‘. 6 vols. (Karachi: Maktaba-i Dār al-‘Ulūm, 2001).

Apart from deploying double-embodiment for inhabiting knowledge production and consumption, orthodox scholars survived modernity, and sometimes thrived in the modern world, due to other social and political factors as well. For example, British colonial authorities expected Hindus and Muslims to consult their legal traditions in matters of personal law. In order to manage the local Muslim population, colonial authorities transformed Islamic jurisprudence into codified law (a process I discuss in later chapters). In so doing, colonial authorities relied on traditional scholars and translations of classical Islamic legal texts. While earlier colonial authorities preferred translated texts to scholars, later colonial courts were open to *responsa* authored by orthodox scholars. The colonial judicial system therefore legitimated the authority of orthodox scholars and their interpretations of Islamic law. By becoming an expert of sacred law, Thānvī advantageously inhabited a subject position sanctioned by colonial governmentality.

Orthodox scholars actively made the most of this advantageous political arrangement. Deobandī and Barelvī scholars intensified *‘ilm-i dīn* for regulating lay Muslims’ intellectual and ritual lives. They proliferated this epistemic configuration using numerous ingenious strategies of social organization (*tadābīr*). These strategies included the establishment of primary religious schools (*maktabs*) and *madrasas*, financial endowments for students and teachers, mass proselytization and preaching (through sermons and printed materials), and vernacular journals and newspapers.⁶ These

⁶ In the context of a *fatwa*, Aḥmad Razā Khān Barelvī listed ten *tadābīr*: (1) the establishment of great *madrassas*; (2) endowments for student stipends; (3) endowments for teacher salaries; (4) students should receive stipends that enable them to excel in areas of religious services where they can perform well (such as delivering sermons, composition of religious literature, teaching in *madrassas*, debating, and so on); (5) trained, salaried scholars should disperse throughout India in order to disseminate religious

strategies of social survival enabled orthodox scholars to inhabit and intensify *'ilm-i dīn* in a highly institutionalized fashion.

For his part, Thānvī vigorously championed the intensification of *'ilm-i dīn*. In his teaching, “knowledge of religion” was the master-concept undergirding the structure of the Islamic scholarly tradition. This concept provided the foundations for his ideas and practices pertaining to subjectivity, embodied desire, domesticity, and communalism. Like other orthodox scholars, Thānvī intensified *'ilm-i dīn* through his industrious publications, sermons, religious responsa, and institutional ṣūfism. Thānvī also tailored a thorough epistemological theory to fit the subject of *'ilm-i dīn*. For him, *'ilm-i dīn* was more than texts about theology, law, and mysticism. Thānvī grounded *'ilm-i dīn* in mystical experience, arguing that knowledge of religion was a gift of God in the form of illumination. Divine light alone made visible the knowledge of reality. In what follows, I examine how Thānvī defined *'ilm-i dīn* as both a type of knowledge and a way of knowing, and how the tension between episteme and epistemology enabled him to address his particular social and political concerns.

Surviving Knowledge in Modernity

“What have we to do with the forms of social progress and education that destroy religion? Such advancement and education ought to be thrown into the burning stove,” said Thānvī in his 1916 sermon, *Alfāz al-Qur'ān (Words of the Qur'ān)*, which he

teachings; (6) established writers should be awarded stipends in order to complete writing projects that support religion and refute non-religious influences; (7) their writings should be published using aesthetically pleasing material and distributed throughout India without any charge; (8) in each vicinity responsible persons should be appointed who invite scholars and disseminate religious literature; (9) the *'ulamā'* should be supported by lay Muslims; (10) Muslims should arrange for the publication of religious articles in national newspapers and start their own weekly or monthly journals. See *Al-'Atāyā' al-nabawiyya fī'l-Fatāwā al-Riḍwiyya*, 29:599-600. Thānvī also used the word, *tadbīr*, to refer to institutional forms of disseminating *'ilm-i dīn* (Nadvī, *Tajdīd-i ta'līm wa tablīgh*, 9).

delivered in the North Indian town of Kairana.⁷ Thānvī embellished this sermon's accessible Urdu prose with Qur'ānic verses, Muḥammad's sayings, and the Persian poetry of Rūmī and Ḥāfīz. The sermon also included examples of analogical reasoning and numerous autobiographical and anonymous didactic anecdotes. Thānvī was acutely aware of British presence in India as he addressed the virtues of Qur'ānic study and encouraged Muslims to pursue religious knowledge.

In this lecture, Thānvī urged listeners to acknowledge the great eschatological reward that awaited them for reciting the Qur'ān and memorizing its verses. Thānvī exhorted Muslims to study and embody the Qur'ān in multiple ways: memorizing its words; learning sacred law from its verses; mastering the art of Qur'ānic recitation; and, contemplating scriptural morals and parables. For him, the very persistence of the Qur'ān in British India constituted a miraculous event:

Brothers! In these times of ours—where there is no real material cause or incentive for undertaking Qur'ānic study; where those who have committed the Qur'ān to memory do not receive any patronized position; where most Muslim elites have become interested in studying English [secular sciences]; where the unbelievers are trying to erase the Qur'ān—you still find innumerable people who have committed the Qur'ān to memory, including young boys, adult men, and even the women of some villages.⁸

Put simply, the Qur'ān had survived colonial modernity. Thānvī invoked lay Muslims, including women and children, as saviors of the Qur'ān. He thus recognized the relevance of ordinary Muslims in his imagined project of surviving modernity. In the above passage, Thānvī scolded modern education, diagnosing it to be the cause of

⁷ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 2:9. Thānvī's nephew, the Ḥadīth scholar Zafar Aḥmad 'Usmānī, served as the scribe for this lecture, which was attended by approximately 1500 people, and lasted for around five hours and fifteen minutes.

⁸ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 2:25.

Muslim moral decay. He chastised two groups for this decay: Western-educated Muslim elites and the unbelievers. The first group was blameworthy because its members were disinterested in preserving and disseminating Qur’ānic teaching. The so-called unbelievers—by which he alluded to either local Hindus or foreign Christians, or both—deserved blame because they were “trying to erase the Qur’ān.”

In *Words of the Qur’ān*, Thānvī repeatedly asserted the importance of religious education, claiming also that colonial Muslims could become affluent and climb up the social ladder without modern education. “Advancement in this world,” he professed, “does not depend on modern education. In fact, trade and commerce (*tijārat*) are more secure ways to advance in this world when compared to secular education.”⁹ This comment reveals how Thānvī reduced modern education to social and financial opportunism. He argued that one could prosper in society by pursuing trade and commerce, occupations that did not require sustained intellectual inquiry about reality and cultural values. Thānvī realized the contentious nature of his claim, and so he qualified his outright rejection of modern education: “For your sake, we can accept that you need modern education to be successful in the world. However, before you acquire modern education you ought to learn the knowledge (*‘ilm*) of religious doctrines (*‘aqā’id*) and commandments (*aḥkām*).”¹⁰ The expression, “for *your* sake,” can be read as Thānvī’s concerted attempt to negotiate authority with an emergent Muslim public. Thānvī taught that lay Muslims could pursue secular education with the caveat that they first acquire *‘ilm-i dīn*, which was necessary for their social identity and after-worldly salvation.

⁹ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 2:14

¹⁰ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 2:14.

In this sermon, Thānvī also emphasized the need for spending time with piety-minded scholars. While it was possible to acquire knowledge about dogma and rituals from books, one needed to spend time with exemplary scholars in order to acquire praiseworthy character traits and sound intellectual taste. In this regard, Thānvī advised his listeners: “During their vacation time, send your children to spend time in the company of pious and devout saints.”¹¹ The company of saintly ones shaped the personalities of ordinary ones. For such orthodox scholars, before Muslims could reside in other worlds, they must find themselves at home in the world of Islamic belief and practice.

Words of the Qur’ān imagined a singular subject position for Indian Muslims. While they could pursue trade and commerce and embolden their social status with the symbolic capital of modern education, their intellectual agenda were defined by religious concerns. This epistemic configuration furnished them with the true knowledge of religious and secular life. As Thānvī explained to his audience members: “Those who study [the modern sciences] should know that in our house [in Islamic religious traditions] they can already find wisdom and profound explanations (*asrār wa ḥikam*), rational explanations of the commandments (*maṣāliḥ ‘aqliyya*), and civilization and politics (*tamaddun wa siyāsat*).”¹² Thānvī imagined *‘ilm-i dīn* as “our house,” with its own philosophical, cultural, and political aura. In this sense, modern knowledge referred to the discursive traditions of foreign houses. In Thānvī’s parlance, modern knowledge was a part of *their* identity that *we* could acquire for secular advancement, but not for

¹¹ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 2:14.

¹² Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 2:14.

moral edification. The analogy of knowledge traditions to domestic spaces is revealing of Thānvī's commitment to protecting Muslim social identity. According to this political desire, Muslims had their own spaces of intellectual belonging. While Thānvī extended provisional hospitality to the guest of modern knowledge, he was quite skeptical of unconditional hospitality. Doors to the house of *'ilm-i dīn* were not readily open for strangers and foreigners, for fixed standards of life had to be preserved in this domestic space.

'Ilm-i dīn: The Bridge to the Prophetic Past

In Thānvī's world, religious knowledge involved traveling back to the prophetic past. This journey entailed a rigorous self-fashioning project that can be summed up as "Becoming Muḥammad." While Muslims in all epochs and locales strove to imitate the Prophet, their particular historical circumstances justified and shaped this mimetic voyage. In her pioneering study of the Deoband Movement, Barbara D. Metcalf casts light on how many modern Muslim scholars understood their present predicament by recourse to the prophetic past:

The modern period of colonial and neocolonial economic dependency, which has typically been seen to benefit Europeans and their collaborators, has thus proven fertile ground for renewal and revolt, for it recalls the endemic injustices perceived by the early Muslims of Muhammad's Arabia. Muslims in these movements have sought to be in touch with the period of revelation, seeking by various means to create at least a shadow of that uncorrupted community where humans had a framework in which to live with each other as they ought. The resulting efforts have differed, depending on the cultural and political constraints within which Muslims have found themselves.¹³

¹³ Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 5.

Metcalf's point illuminates the existential predicament of orthodox scholars in British India. The prolific literary output of scholars such as Thānvī evidences the desire "to be in touch" with the origin of Islam as a discursive tradition and a civilizational force. Such orthodox authorities identified two origins of Islam: Muḥammad's body was the religion's spatial origin and the event of Qur'ānic revelation was its temporal origin. Orthodox scholars used their imaginative and analytical capacities to inhabit and intensify several transmitted bodies of knowledge. These epistemic configurations anchored their religious orientation and helped them explain and make sense of their historical situation. Deobandī and Barelvī narratives of belonging especially appropriated the twin discourses of sacred law and mysticism. These discourses grounded their bodies in history and community and constituted for them the core of *'ilm-i dīn*.

'Ilm-i dīn was the most important teaching of Islam after belief, according to Thānvī's treatise, *Ḥayāt al-muslimīn* (*The Life of Muslims*).¹⁴ In this book, he explained the core teachings of Islam under the rubric of twenty-five "essentials" (*arwāḥ*).¹⁵ He argued that practicing these teachings would restore the soul in the collective body of Muslims. In his enumeration, "the acquisition and teaching of *'ilm-i dīn*" was the second most essential teaching of Islam. Thānvī underscored the significance and obligation of

¹⁴ Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Ḥayāt al-muslimīn* (Lahore: Waqar Publishers, n.d.).

¹⁵ These twenty-five *arwāḥ* of Islam included: (1) belief or *imān*; (2) the acquisition and teaching of *'ilm-i dīn*; (3) learning and teaching of the Qur'ān; (4) love for God and the Prophet Muḥammad; (5) belief in predestination and reliance on God; (6) supplication—*duā*; (7) socialization with the pious; (8) following the Prophet Muḥammad's exemplary character; (9) fulfilling the rights of fellow Muslims; (10) self-care—*apnī jān ke ḥuqūq adā karnā*; (11) observance of the daily prayers—*namāz*; (12) building mosques; (13) abundantly remembering God—*zikr*; (14) giving alms—*zakāt*; (15) spending one's wealth for good works and helping out others with financial assistance; (16) fasting; (17) the Ḥajj pilgrimage; (18) giving animal sacrifice; (19) securing a stable livelihood; (20) marriage and reproduction; (21) not becoming too attached with worldly life and preoccupation with the afterlife; (22) saving oneself from sinful acts; (23) patience and gratitude; (24) consulting trustworthy persons in matters requiring consultation—*mashwara*; (25) donning the visible signs of one's Islamic identity.

religious knowledge by recourse to the prophetic past: “The Prophet has said, ‘Acquiring *‘ilm-i dīn* is obligatory on each Muslim.’ This ḥadīth demonstrates that learning *‘ilm-i dīn* is obligatory on all Muslims, male and female, urban or rural, prosperous or impoverished.”¹⁶ In the prophetic social imaginary, *‘ilm-i dīn* cut across the differentiating strata of gender, region, and class, as it was the most general need of Muslims.

How does one acquire this knowledge? What sorts of books does it require? Thānvī explained: “Acquiring *‘ilm-i dīn* does not entail exclusive study of Arabic texts; instead, it means that one learns the teachings of religion by means of Arabic or Urdu books, and one interacts with authentic scholars or arranges for authentic religious speakers to deliver sermons.”¹⁷ These pedagogical strategies were meant to intensify *‘ilm-i dīn*. The actualization of these strategies would ensure the social significance of “authentic” scholars and speakers, but also the validity of the burgeoning body of Islamic literature in the Urdu language. After all, Thānvī and his Deobandī colleagues had authored a significant portion of this body of knowledge. While all Muslims were expected to learn *‘ilm-i dīn*, Thānvī paid special attention to Muslim women’s religious education. As he advised further in *The Life of Muslims*: “Illiterate women who cannot make their way to a religious scholar should contact scholars through their male relatives”¹⁸ Male relatives mediated between women and male scholars.

Orthodox scholars also inhabited a position of mediation, for they transmitted lofty prophetic knowledge to lay Muslims. Teaching prophetic knowledge, argued

¹⁶ Thānvī, *Ḥayāt al-muslimīn*, 17.

¹⁷ Thānvī, *Ḥayāt al-muslimīn*, 17-18.

¹⁸ Thānvī, *Ḥayāt al-muslimīn*, 18.

Thānvī, was the most honorable service one could render to Muslims in colonial India. For him, the ‘*ulamā*’ were fulfilling the most general need of Muslims: “In the present circumstances, you cannot provide any service to the people better than religious education.”¹⁹ The ‘*ulamā*’ were an essential necessity in the world of Muslim orthodoxy. Lay Muslims needed the scholars for understanding and embodying prophetic precept and practice.

Echoing a ḥadīth, Thānvī claimed that all divine prophets—from biblical ones to Muḥammad—bequeathed their knowledge to their followers. This knowledge transcended mere words; it engendered a powerful relationship with a sublime God. As Thānvī exhorted, “Think carefully about what type of knowledge can actually be called ‘inheritance of the prophets’ (*mirāth al-anbiyā*). God forbid, can knowledge that does not produce trembling before God (*khashya*) ever be called prophetic knowledge? Does prophetic knowledge merely furnish you with the know-how of a few legal matters and religious terminology? Absolutely not! God’s prophets acquired knowledge and it only increased their devotion to God.”²⁰ Thānvī stressed the embodied nature of religious knowledge, which he envisioned in affective terms (“trembling before God”). This type of knowledge invoked feelings of awe and fear within the believer, leading her or him to embody God’s commandments. The prophets exemplified this transformative epistemic formation. *‘Ilm-i dīn* was another name for prophetic knowledge, from which bodies— hearts, minds, actions, relations, feelings—were fashioned.

¹⁹ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *al-‘Ilm wa’l-‘ulamā*, ed. Muḥammad Zayd Maḏāhirī Nadvī (Hatwara, [Banda, India]: Idāra-yi Ta’līfāt-i Ashrafiyya, 1990), 3.

²⁰ Nadvī, *Tajdīd-i ta’līm wa tabliḡh*, 125. See also Thānvī, *al-‘ilm wa’l-‘ulamā*, 8.

In a 1923 sermon titled, *al-'Ilm wa'l-khashya* (*Knowledge and Trembling*), Thānvī elaborated on the affective dimensions of *'ilm-i dīn*. Thānvī pursued this elaboration in an extended commentary on the ḥadīth: “I am the most knowledgeable about God, but also the most God-fearing of you.”²¹ This prophetic report connected *'ilm* with *khashya*, making vivid the relationship between the discursive and the affective. Discursive knowledge, according to this ḥadīth, had the power to move individuals. Thānvī invoked the dyad of means and ends in his interpretation of this ḥadīth. For him, “knowledge of God” was instrumental for embodying *khashya*. Thānvī analogized the relationship between *'ilm-i dīn* and *khashya* to ritual washing (*wuḍū'*) and the daily prayer (*namāz*). The act of washing one’s face, arms, and feet—while wiping a wet hand over one’s head—was not an end in itself. Ritual washing prepared one to perform the prayer, which drew one closer to God through the following symbolic and bodily acts of submission: standing humbly before the Creator, reciting portions of divine revelation, bowing before the Majestic Power, rubbing one’s head on the ground before the Most High—placing one’s intelligence and sensation at the feet of God—and then finally beseeching God in a sitting position. In Muslim sacred law, although this devotion was an *end-in-itself* it was only valid after a *means-to-an-end*, namely ritual purification of the body with water. Likewise, embodying devotion and piety was possible only after one’s heart and mind were purified by *ilm-i dīn*.

'Ilm-i dīn was essentially about doing things with one’s body: performing the ritual prayer at least five times a day; fasting from dawn to dusk during the month of

²¹ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 2:241.

Ramaḍān; handing over alms to the poor; visiting Mecca for the Ḥajj pilgrimage. These salvation practices constituted a form of *cultus*, a conscious devotion to and reverence for God. One could not embody this *cultus* without knowledge of the *sharīʿa*, or rather, without knowledge about how the Muslim community had understood and formulated the *sharīʿa*. These historical formulations formed the subject matter of sacred law or *fiqh*. A Muslim had to learn *fiqh* in order to execute these cult practices, which were of utmost importance not only for securing salvation in the afterlife, but also as the social markers of Muslim identity.

Deobandīs and Barelvīs bound themselves to the Ḥanafī School of *fiqh*. Their conformity (*taqlīd*) to Ḥanafism can be understood as an identitarian mode of intellectual belonging, a strict and disciplined *thinking-within* the normative framework of an intellectual tradition. Thānvī adhered to Ḥanafī legalism to the extent that it became a part of his identity (he self-identified as such by penning “Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī the Ḥanafī” in some prefaces to his writings).²² Thānvī readily used legal categories to think about mystical experience. A case in point was his invocation of the unintended act and the intended act to think about “wayward thoughts” (*khaṭarāt*). Thānvī thus analyzed the affective tendencies of mysticism and mystical experience by recourse to *fiqh*’s discursive framework. He theorized subjective states such as feelings of guilt and shame by recourse to legal concepts such as moral obligation (*taḳlīf*). Ṣūfism and *fiqh* were mutually supportive discourses in his religious practice.

²² A case in point is Thānvī, *Bihishtī zewar*, 22.

In this regard, Thānvī inhabited reformed ṣūfism that hearkened back to the teachings of the early modern Indian ṣūfī-jurist Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624).²³ Sirhindī's Ṣūfism was intensely *sharī'a*-minded, providing the context for Thānvī's particular style of double-embodiment. The late Marshall Hodgson used the phrase, "*Sharī'ah*-minded," to characterize the historically specific "conception of universality" that was inherent in the worldviews of Muslim jurists from the mid-eighth to the mid-ninth centuries. As Hodgson explained, "For them, this meant first that every person, as such, with no exceptions, was summoned in his own person to obey the commands of God: there could be no intermediary, no group responsibility, no evasion of any sort from direct confrontation with the divine will; and, moreover, that a person was summoned to nothing else."²⁴ In the following centuries, Muslim legal thinkers conceptualized this "confrontation with the divine will" under the rubric of "moral obligation" (*taklīf*). The concept of *taklīf* was immensely important for *sharī'a*-minded mystics. Before Sirhindī, the major ṣūfī theorists of this form of mysticism included Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 1074) and Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1111). Legal-minded mysticism of this sort emphasized the strict observance of sacred law, which it termed to be the *only* path to mystical insight.

Observation of sacred law entailed two forms of *taklīf*: personal and collective. Thānvī elaborated the implications of personal and collective moral obligation in terms of *'ilm-i dīn*. All Muslims were required to fulfill "the personal obligation" (*farḍ 'ayn*).

²³ On Sirhindī, see Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī: An Outline of his Thought and a Study of his Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1971]). For English translations of Sirhindī's collected *Letters*, see Fazlur Rahman, *Selected Letters of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1968); Arthur Buehler, *Revealed Grace: The Juristic Sufism of Ahmad Sirhindī (1564-1624)* (Louisville, KY.: Fons Vitae, 2011).

²⁴ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:318.

However, a representative individual or group of Muslims could fulfill “the communal responsibility” (*farḍ kifāya*) on behalf of the community. Acquiring the knowledge of personal obligations was *farḍ ‘ayn*, whereas acquiring knowledge about communal responsibilities was *farḍ kifāya*. This meant that all Muslims were obliged to acquire enough knowledge to affirm normative doctrines (*‘aqā’id*) and embody the Islamic teaching on salvation practices (*‘ibādāt*), social life (*mu‘āsharat*), and transactions (*mu‘āmalāt*). But not all Muslims were required to learn comparative religion, for scholars could fulfill this *farḍ kifāya*, and thereby defend orthodox doctrine and practice against external criticism.²⁵

In Thānvī’s context, orthodox theologians acquired knowledge of apologetic polemics in order to confront their critics. These confrontations were textual and sociological, involving fatwa clashes and “public debate and discussion” (*munāzara wa mubāḥatha*). Orthodox scholars actively debated Shī‘a scholars, Sunnī non-conformists, and Muslim modernists. The orthodoxy dismissed Shī‘ism and non-conformity by recourse to internal theological categories. Muslim modernism, however, posed a different type of threat to orthodoxy, for the modernists appealed to the extra-scriptural authority of reason. Moreover, orthodox scholars saw Muslim modernism as a proxy for European colonialism and its policies of modern education and enlightenment. The colonialist agenda involved the creation of a local mediating class, which could acquire and disseminate English education. A notorious example of this colonizing agenda was the text titled *Minute of Indian Education* (1835), authored by the colonial administrator Thomas Macaulay (1800-1859). The latter envisaged establishing new educational

²⁵ Nadvī, *Tajdīd-i ta‘līm wa tabligh*, 12-15.

institutions in order to enlighten “the natives”: “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of person, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.”²⁶ These native intellectuals excelled in the European sciences and humanistic traditions, becoming “vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.”²⁷ Thānvī referred to this native mediating class as “the gentlemen,” criticizing them for mimicking colonial knowledge.

The Polemics of Orthodoxy

Thānvī’s criticism of Muslim modernism and its rationalist “gentlemen” was an instance of intra-Muslim debates over religious normativity and authenticity in colonial India. Muslim modernists had re-introduced in this context rationalist methods of interpreting scriptural sources. In so doing, they claimed that they were following the same luminaries who were sources of inspiration for orthodox scholars. In this regard, the chief inspiration for both groups—orthodox scholars and modernist reformers—came from the writings of the eighteenth-century Muslim theologian and mystic, Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi (1702-1763).²⁸ Muslim modernists took a liberal approach to the methods and teachings of Shāh Walī Allāh, while orthodox scholars adopted a more conservative

²⁶ Thomas Macaulay, *Speeches by Lord Macaulay, with his Minute on Indian Education*, ed. G. M. Young (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 359.

²⁷ Macaulay, *Speeches*, 359.

²⁸ A leading scholar of Muslim theology, mysticism, and Ḥadīth, Shāh Walī Allāh drew on several bodies of knowledge to address “the intellectual and spiritual disciplines of the Islamic heritage in his age in order to elucidate the wisdom and inner meanings behind the interpretation of the hadīth reports of the Prophet Muḥammad” (Marcia K. Hermansen, “Translator’s Introduction,” In *The Conclusive Argument from God: Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi’s Hujjat Allāh al-bāligha*, trans. Marcia K. Hermansen [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996], xv). For studies of Shāh Walī Allāh’s religious thought, see J. M. S. Baljon, *Religion and Thought of Shāh Walī Allāh Dihlawī, 1703-1762* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986); A.J. Halepota, *Philosophy of Shah Waliullah* (Lahore: Sind Sagar Academy, 1970-78?); Ghulam Husain Jalbani, *Teachings of Shāh Waliullāh of Delhi* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1967).

approach. The modernists' rationalization of religious beliefs contested entrenched interpretations of doctrine and dogma cherished by orthodox scholars. The latter authorities therefore spilt much ink defending their long-held methods of interpretation and creedal tenets.

For their part, the modernists denigrated orthodox learning and institutions. The foremost Muslim modernist of the nineteenth century, Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (1817-1898), had this to say about the orthodox establishment: "Many schools regulated by the old system have been established by the Muhammadans of Jounpore, Allygurh, Cawnpore, Saharanpore, Deoband, Delhi and Lahore...but they are altogether useless to the nation at large...and no good can be expected from them."²⁹ Unlike the vanguards of the "old system," Muslim modernists took seriously the discursive traditions of the modern West as they repurposed the doctrinal and practical teachings of Islam. The modernists demanded the universal actualization of civilizational progress, scientific knowledge, and national sovereignty. While elite Muslim modernists later became effective political actors (especially with reference to the Pakistan Movement), they hardly matched orthodoxy's communal authority and public presence in late colonial India.

There were also heated polemical debates within orthodox circles. Deobandī and Barelvī responsa literature documented intense intra-Muslim discursive contestations over issues such as prophetology, divine knowledge, saintly mediation, and customary practices. Thānvī's edited collection of religious responsa, *Imdād al-fatāwā*, included

²⁹ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, "Report to the Committee for Diffusion and Advancement of Learning among the Mussulmans of India, 1872," 3.

many *fatwas* addressing doctrinal issues (*‘aqā’id*).³⁰ In Barelvī circles, Aḥmad Razā Khān’s multi-volume *Fatāwā-yi Riḍwiyya* was an unparalleled collection of legal responsa.³¹ These collections evidenced that inter-religious debates—between Hindus, Muslims, and Christians—played only a minor role in determining the contours of subjective belief for orthodox scholars.³² What really mattered were intra-Muslim debates over orthopraxy and orthodoxy. What seemed trivial questions to outsiders—for example, does the Prophet Muḥammad have self-authorized knowledge of the unseen?—were eminently important questions in intra-Muslim debates. In answering such questions, Muslim theologians of various ideological orientations debated the content and form of doctrinal and ritual authenticity and the definitions of heresy and heterodoxy. Deobandī and Barelvī scholars refuted and anathematized each other as well. Several Barelvī scholars anathematized Thānvī for his views about the limitations of prophetic knowledge in his brief treatise, *Ḥifẓ al-imān (The Protection of Faith)*.³³

Thānvī also deployed gate-keeping tactics such as anathematization in order to delimit authentic belief and practice. He anathematized the teachings of a minority Shī‘ī

³⁰ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Imdād al-fatāwā*, ed. Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘. 6 vols. (Karachi: Maktaba-i Dār al-‘Ulūm, 2001).

³¹ Aḥmad Razā Khān Barelvī, *Al-‘Aṭāyā’ al-nabawiyya fī’l-Fatāwā al-Riḍwiyya [Fatāwā-yi Riḍwiyya]*. 30 vols. (Lahore: Razā Foundation, 2006).

³² Numerous scholars of South Asian Islam have noted this point. See, for example, Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 355-58. Metcalf writes: “One of the most striking characteristics of the process of modern religious change among Indian Muslims has been the degree of internal dispute that has been generated” (355). For a more robust discussion of intra-Muslim polemics in colonial India, see SherAli Tareen, “Normativity, Heresy, and the Politics of Authenticity in South Asian Islam.” *The Muslim World* 99 (July 2009): 520-552.

³³ See Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Ḥifẓ al-imān* (Deoband: Dār al-Kitāb, n.d.). Examples of Barelvī anathematization of Thānvī can be found in Aḥmad Razā Khān Barelvī, *Husām al-Ḥaramayn ‘alā manḥar al-kufr wa-al-mayn* (Lahore: Maktaba-i Nabawiyya, 1975); Abū’l-Tāhir Muḥammad Ṭayyib Ṣiddīqī, *Tajānub ahl al-sunnat ‘an ahl al-fitna* (Bareilly: Bareilly Electronic Press, 1361 AH, ca. 1942).

community, the Aghā Khānīs.³⁴ Otherwise known as Nizārī Ismā‘īlīs, the Aghā Khānīs were active in colonial India, especially from the late 1840s onwards when their leader, the first Aghā Khān Ḥasan ‘Alī Shāh (1804-1881) fled from Persia and settled in Bombay.³⁵ In a treatise titled *Qā'id-i Qādiyān (The Leader of Qādiyān)*, Thānvī anathematized the Muslim scholar Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad Qādiyānī (the late 1830s-1908) and members of his budding socio-religious movement.³⁶ Thānvī was a bit more cautious about anathematizing the pre-eminent Sayyid Aḥmad Khān. Nonetheless, Thānvī cited other Indian ‘*ulamā*’, including his teacher Muḥammad Ya‘qūb Nānōtvī, who had anathematized the Muslim modernist. Sayyid Aḥmad Khān had mounted considerable pressure on the orthodox establishment. In fact, orthodox scholars perceived his modernist explanations of religious teachings to be more dangerous than the teachings of other groups they dubbed heretical. Sayyid Aḥmad Khān embraced the European Enlightenment and its values, calling for a critical overhaul of traditional theology, legalism, and mysticism.

Deobandī and Barelvī scholars discredited the teachings of Muslim modernists in their recorded conversations, sermons, and written texts. The following short citation from Aḥmad Razā Khān is a case in point: “Sir [Sayyid] Aḥmad Khān was a wretched apostate [*murtadd*].”³⁷ Orthodox scholars such as Barelvī and Thānvī dubbed Sayyid

³⁴ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Al-Hukm al-ḥaqqānī fī ḥizb al-Āghā Khānī (The Truthful Judgment on the Agha Khānī Sect)* in Thānvī, *Bawādir al-nawādir* (Lahore: Idāra-i Islāmiyyat, 1985): 737-741.

³⁵ For more on the Aghā Khānīs in colonial India, see Teena Purohit, *The Agha Khan Case: Religion and Identity in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MASS.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

³⁶ Thānvī, *Bawādir al-nawādir*, 724-736. On the Aḥmadiyya, see Spencer Lavan, *The Ahmadiyyah Movement: A History and Perspective* (Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1974); Yohanan Friedmann, *Prophecy Continues: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and its Medieval Background* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).

³⁷ Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Razā Khān, *Malḥūzāt-i Mujaddid-i miyat-i ḥāzira mu'ayyad-i millat-i ṭāhira* (Lahore: Kamyāb Dār al-Tablīgh, 1977), 319.

Aḥmad Khān a “naturalist” (*naycharī*), due to the latter’s penchant for a formulaic equivalence between revealed law and natural law.³⁸ We should note that Sayyid Aḥmad Khān had not called for anything radically new in the history of Muslim thought. Several past Muslim jurists had accepted the authority of reason as a valid source of legal and moral norms. The modernist project of scholars such as Sayyid Aḥmad Khān hearkened back to classical rationalist theologians such as the Ḥanafī jurist Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 981) and the Mu‘tazilī theologian Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025). In the ideological universe of these pre-modern scholars, reason was “an authoritative source of Sharī‘a norms, alongside revealed scripture and other authoritative source-texts.”³⁹ Similar to these past theologians, Sayyid Aḥmad Khān concluded: “Nothing in the Holy Qur’ān contradicts the law of nature [*qānūn-i fiṭrat*].”⁴⁰ The details of Muslim sacred law, argued Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, should therefore conform to reason.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, several orthodox figures well versed in the rational sciences themselves refuted Sayyid Aḥmad Khān’s interpretations. For example, the Delhi-based Qur’ānic exegete and orthodox Sunnī scholar ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Ḥaqqānī (1851-1917) pointedly refuted the naturalists in his voluminous Qur’ānic commentary.⁴¹ For these theologians, Sayyid Aḥmad Khān had violated their tradition’s established creed, the self-evident normative doctrines (*ḍarūriyāt al-dīn*). These contestations showed that for the orthodox not every form of discursive production by

³⁸ See, for example, Aziz Ahmed, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967): 40-54. For a robust discussion of natural law as a valid source of legal norms in Islamic legalism, see Anver M. Emon, *Islamic Natural Law Theories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³⁹ Emon, *Islamic Natural Law Theories*, 3.

⁴⁰ Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, *Tahrīr fī uṣūl al-tafsīr* (Agra: Maṭba‘a Mufīd-i ‘Ām, 1892), 42.

⁴¹ See, Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Ḥaqqānī, *Tafsīr fath al-mannān al-mashhūr bi-Tafsīr-i Ḥaqqānī* (Lahore: Maktabat al-Ḥasan, 1977). For a biographical note on Ḥaqqānī, see ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, 8:241-2.

and for Muslims amounted to *'ilm-i dīn*. In order for someone's interpretation to count as *'ilm-i dīn*, it had to agree with certain past authoritative doctrinal positions.

Thānvī articulated his biting analysis of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān in the context of an 1887 *fatwa*.⁴² The questioner simply asked whether Sayyid Aḥmad Khān and his followers were Muslims or unbelievers. Thānvī did not provide an immediate answer. Instead, he situated the question of doctrinal and practical authenticity in the discursive framework of centennial renewal (*tajdīd*). He argued that each hundred years God renews Muslim devotional life by sending a reviver (*mujaddid*) who obliterates heresies and restores the Muslim community to the pristine example of the Prophet Muḥammad (the *sunna*). The *mujaddid* battles the unorthodox tendencies of his age, including teachings resembling those of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān. After this prelude, Thānvī said: “The naturalist sect has emerged only in the fourteenth century of our calendar [from the late nineteenth to the late-twentieth centuries]. Its members refute all genuine scholars of Islam and adulterate the divine norms.”⁴³ Thānvī identified Sayyid Aḥmad Khān as the founder of this nascent sect. After providing a scandalous biographical note on the latter's life, Thānvī attributed the doctrinal and religious lethargy of Muslims to the influences of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān's teachings.

Thānvī presented the core of his refutation of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān and other modernists in the form of a chart inclusive of fifty citations. The chart provided thorough bibliographical information about these citations. Next to each “heretical” citation, the chart also supplied the “orthodox” position from canonical sources of Sunnī theology.

⁴² Thānvī, *Imdād al-fatāwā*, 6:166-185.

⁴³ Thānvī, *Imdād al-fatāwā*, 6:167. Thānvī said something similar in Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 5:165.

Thānvī cited Sayyid Aḥmad Khān's interpretations from his journal articles.⁴⁴ Thānvī also quoted other modernist authors, including Muḥsin al-Mulk Mahdī 'Alī Khān (1837-1907), Muḥammad Zakāullāh (1832-1910), and Chirāg 'Alī (1844-1895).⁴⁵ The citations from their works included claims of various sorts, from theological to historical to legal. In general, Thānvī contested these scholars' modernist interpretations pertaining to the reality of angels and Satan; punishment in the grave; the reality of the afterlife; the historical validity of the Flood during Noah's lifetime; the authority of consensus (*ijmā'*) as a source of Islamic law; the democratization of independent legal judgment (*ijtihad*); and so on.

The chart of citations from the published writings of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān and other modernist authors enabled Thānvī to substantiate his claims about the heterodoxy of Muslim modernists. The thrust of this *fatwa* demonstrated that modernist authors had violated the self-evident normative teachings of Sunnī theology. Thānvī pointed out that these authors had gone astray because they had not mastered the art of interpretation (*ta'wīl*):

Perhaps you will object that false interpretations alone do not make one a non-Muslim. My answer is simple: some of these people do not even offer any interpretations for their rejection of fundamental beliefs. Moreover, you ought to understand that interpretative flexibility does not always exonerate one from the charge of unbelief. We attribute someone's creedal disagreement to the right of interpretation only when the meaning conforms to the text's semantic range. Moreover, interpretations cannot violate the self-evident normative teachings...otherwise, every false sect

⁴⁴ The cited journals included *Tehzīb-i Akhlāq*, *Nūr al-Āfāq*, and *Akmal al-Akhhbār*.

⁴⁵ On these luminaries of the Aligarh School, see Muḥammad Amīn Zubairī, *Hayāt-i Muḥsin, ya 'nī sawānīh 'umrī Nawāb Muḥsin al-dawla Muḥsin al-mulk Mawlawī Sayyid Mahdī 'Alī Khān* (Karachi: Academy of Educational Research, 1994); Charles Freer Andrews, *Zaka Ullah of Delhi*, with an introduction by Maulvi Nazir Ahmad (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1929); A.N.M. Wahidur-Rahman, *The Religious Thought of Moulvi Chirāgh 'Alī*. M.A. Thesis. McGill University. Montreal, Canada. 1982.

among Muslims will justify itself by taking refuge in interpretative flexibility.⁴⁶

‘Ilm-i dīn presupposed rootedness in classical Muslim theology. New interpretations could not violate the creedal dogmas of the community nor could they violate the semantic range of scriptural texts. Thānvī’s *fatwa* delivered a counterpunch to Muslim modernists, reinforcing the established tradition of orthodox interpretation. At times, Thānvī even appropriated the language of reason when criticizing the modernists. In fact, Muslim orthodoxy domesticated the language of reason, Greek logic, and philosophical theology.

The Orthodox Domestication of Reason

Thānvī appropriated rational theology in his books, *Islām aur ‘aqliyyāt* (*Islam and the Rational Sciences*) and *al-Maṣāliḥ al-‘aqliyya lil-aḥkām al-naqliyya* (*Rational Considerations of Traditional Norms*).⁴⁷ These two texts largely drew from past and contemporaneous works, especially Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, Shāh Walī Allāh’s *Hujjat Allāh al-bāligha*, and Ḥusayn al-Jisr al-Ṭarābulusī’s *Risālah al-Ḥamīdiyyah*.⁴⁸ Thānvī trusted and praised these texts, repurposing their

⁴⁶ Thānvī, *Imdād al-fatāwā*, 6:183.

⁴⁷ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Islām aur ‘aqliyyāt* (Lahore: Idāra-i Islāmiyyat, 1994); *Al-Maṣāliḥ al-‘aqliyya lil-aḥkām al-naqliyya* (Karachi: Dār al-Ishā‘at, 1977). Thānvī’s *Islām aur ‘aqliyyāt* originated in a lecture he delivered at the Aligarh Muslim University. The lecture was published as: Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Al-Intibahāt al-mufīda ‘an al-ishtibahāt al-jadīda* (Deoband: Maktaba-i Nashr al-Qur’ān, n.d.). *Islām aur ‘aqliyyāt* was a later publication that included the original text and a commentary on it by Thānvī’s disciple Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Khān Bijṇawrī. For an English translation of the original Aligarh lecture, see Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Answer to Modernism*, trans. Muhammad Hasan Askari and Karrar Husain (Karachi: Maktaba Darululoom, 1976). For an analysis of this text, see Fuad S. Naeem, “A Traditional Islamic Response to the Rise of Modernism.” In *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition*, ed. J.E.B. Lumbard (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2009): 79-116.

⁴⁸ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1991); Shāh Walī Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm, *Hujjat Allāh al-bāligha* (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1978); Ḥusayn al-Jisr al-Ṭarābulusī, *al-Risālah al-Ḥamīdiyya fī ḥaqīqat al-diyāna al-Islāmīya wa-ḥaqīqat al-Sharī‘ah al-Muḥammadiyya*, ed. Muḥammad al-Mu‘taṣim billāh al-Baghdādī (Tripoli, Lebanon: Dār al-Īmān, 1998).

contents in his own writings and *fatwas*. I analyze Thānvī's instrumental use of reason by closely reading a 1904 *fatwa*.⁴⁹

Thānvī wrote the 1904 *fatwa* in response to an inquiry consisting of multiple dizzying questions. The questioner was disturbed by contradictions between two sources of truth, namely religious truth and rational truth. The questioner was familiar with the modern challenges faced by orthodox theologians. The questioner must have been a well-rounded Muslim intellectual, for the queries used the terminology of multiple discursive traditions: ancient philosophy, modern science, and Muslim scriptural sources. The list of questions began with an interrogation of the reality of the sun, the moon, and the stars. Were these entities guided by natural causation or by God's command? The questioner then posed a long list of inquiries, including: What is the essence of the dark spots on the surface of the moon? What do we make of substantial perspectival differences between Greek philosophers and Muslim religious scholars? Is rain caused by natural processes or delivered to earthly soil by God's angels? What causes earthquakes? Is the earth round or flat? What is the reality of hell-fire? The inquiring text included additional similar questions, stopping short of asking about theodicy.

Thānvī did not dismiss these questions as irreverent to his religious sensibilities or as outside the purview of his religious expertise, for such a dismissal would have contradicted his claims about the sovereignty of *'ilm-i dīn*. By taking on these challenging questions, Thānvī demonstrated how orthodox scholars could address everything that a Muslim needed to know in order to secure his or her faith. Thānvī was therefore confident that he had the intellectual tools needed to answer questions about the

⁴⁹ Thānvī, *Imdād al-fatāwā*, 6:151-156.

natural world and issues of causation. The Muslim religious scholar trained in the traditional and rational sciences, argued Thānvī, had nothing to fear in the face of European philosophy or science, for he stared at this face with the stern eyes of reason.

In his reply, Thānvī first outlined an interpretive strategy that he believed could resolve rational doubts about religious doctrine. This strategy involved creating typologies in order to categorize the relationship between reason and revelation. According to Thānvī, reason-based arguments and revelation-based arguments could converge, diverge, or remain indifferent toward each other. Where reason and revelation converged—in points where there was *muwāfaqa*—Thānvī was not obliged to furnish an answer, for there was no contradiction to be resolved. In these instances, the rational proof only served to show the prior truth of the revealed claim. Likewise, he argued, was the case with points of indifference between reason and revelation, for scriptural sources themselves remained “silent” (*sākit*) on these matters. In these areas, one could accept the conclusions of reason with the caveat that these conclusions did not contradict any of the “necessary truths” articulated by past orthodox authorities. Thānvī argued that he was obliged to provide answers only where reason and revelation were at odds with each other (where there was *mukhālaḥa* between these two sources of knowledge). Thānvī then addressed questions that belonged to this third type of relationship between reason and revelation.

Thānvī’s commitment to orthodoxy was on full display when he addressed those questions to which reason and revelation gave contradictory answers. He divided the contradictions between revealed truth and reasoned truth into two types: (1) judgments for which philosophers had no demonstrative proof; (2) judgments based on

demonstrative proof. For Thānvī, the believer was not obliged to accept philosophical judgments unfounded in demonstration. However, where a demonstrative proof contradicted a revealed teaching, there the believer must resort to reconciliation between these two sources of knowledge, for truth cannot be self-contradictory. Thānvī taught that in such cases, Muslims must accept contradiction-effacing interpretations of religious texts, for revelation never contradicted pure reason. By taking this position, Thānvī aligned himself with the Māturīdī school of Sunnī theology.⁵⁰

This interpretive schema was not unique to Thānvī, as practitioners of *kalām* before him had deployed these categories in order to resolve supposed tensions between reason and revelation. Thānvī's appropriation of *kalām*, however, rested on certain modern assumptions about ancient philosophy, modern science, and religion. Note that the questioner invoked both ancient philosophy and modern science. In his reply, however, Thānvī assumed that the two bodies of knowledge were identical, as if modern science was an extension of Greek philosophy. Orthodox authorities such as Thānvī were not attuned to the substantial epistemological and methodological differences between ancient philosophy and modern science and rationalism.⁵¹

By using the language of reason for apologetic purposes, Thānvī served the particular colonial demand to modernize local religious traditions. The modern (colonial) world would salvage those relics of the past that proved their utilitarian value. Religious

⁵⁰ This School of Muslim theology was based on the teachings of Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Samarqandī al-Māturīdī (d. 944). The Māturīdī School was the predominant theological orientation of Ḥanafī jurists. For a thorough exposition of Māturīdī theology, see Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand*, trans. Rodrigo Adem (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015).

⁵¹ For Hannah Arendt, "Modern science is based on a philosophy of doubt, as distinguished from ancient science, which was based on a philosophy of *thaumadzein*, or wonder at that which is as it is" ("Religion and Politics," In *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn [New York: Schocken, 1994]: 368-390, 370).

ideas and practices that served practical human needs, such as ethics and neighborly love, were commended for their utility. But there was no place in the modern world for those ideas and practices that reeked of superstition. In this context, translating one's beliefs in the language of reason served the colonial demand for modernization, which was the social logic and practice that enabled the transformation of the locals into a disciplined and industrious subject population. By instrumentalizing reason for apologetic purposes, Thānvī urged his readership to appreciate the utilitarian purchase of their religious values. He consistently argued that orthodox dogma yielded not only salvation in the afterlife, but also secured plenty good in worldly life.

All in all, Thānvī employed both tradition and reason to criticize Muslim modernism. In his sermons and treatises, Thānvī showcased the intellectual tools at his disposal for meeting the challenges of colonial modernity. He posited *'ilm-i dīn* as a compelling alternative to modern knowledge. While Thānvī blurred the differences between ancient and modern philosophical systems, he acknowledged the traction of empiricism in modern European thought. The modern epistemological theory that undergirded the colonial enterprise, especially the British version, assumed a knowing subject who possessed the world through the senses. As Bernard Cohn points out, "To the educated Englishman of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the world was knowable through the senses, which could record the experience of a natural world."⁵² Scholars have documented thoroughly the modernist and colonialist emphasis on empiricism, and what Cohn calls "investigate modalities." Speaking of India's

⁵² Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 4.

colonizers, Cohn says, “In coming to India, they unknowingly and unwittingly invaded and conquered not only a territory but an epistemological space as well. The ‘facts’ of this space did not exactly correspond to those of the invaders. Nevertheless, the British believed they could explore and conquer this space through translation: establishing correspondence could make the unknown and the strange knowable.”⁵³ While colonial authorities conquered local epistemological space and created fields of signification in which local forms of knowledge became intelligible for them, local authors and actors also pushed back. Scholars such as Thānvī elaborated their own epistemologies, grounding “authentic” knowledge not in empirical knowledge but in mystical experience.

Orthodox Refutations of Modern Knowing

In addition to refuting modern knowledge, Thānvī also refuted modern ways of knowing. In his recorded conversations, sermons, legal responsa, and treatises, Thānvī criticized over-reliance on empirical knowledge. For Thānvī, *‘ilm-i dīn* was essential knowing, as it alone yielded knowledge of reality. All other forms of knowing were accidental or served utilitarian purposes. In a lecture titled *Tadhkīr al-ākhirat (Reminder of the Afterlife)*, Thānvī deprioritized scientific and philosophical knowledge by comparing it to the art of shoe making:

The example of finding scientific and philosophical knowledge in the Holy Qur’ān is similar to finding instructions on the art of shoe making in the *Ṭibb-i Akbar* [a canonical medieval medical manual]. The Holy Qur’ān is like *Ṭibb-i Akbar*; it is not a book about the science of shoe making. In the Qur’ān, you will find formulas for spiritual edification and reformation.⁵⁴

⁵³ Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, 4.

⁵⁴ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 1:425. *Ṭibb-i Akbar* refers to the medieval medical manual, *Kitāb al-ṭibb* of Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Najīb al-Dīn al-Samarqandī (d. 1222).

Thānvī saw non-religious sciences as mere instruments to attend to the necessities of life. He continued: “What does a *true* Muslim have to do with such discourses? Only that knowledge is required which has a practical *telos*.”⁵⁵ For Thānvī, the Qur’ān, which served as a metonym for “religious knowledge,” could not be reduced to a book of science, philosophy, or medicine.

Thānvī elaborated and intensified an alternative epistemology grounded in ritual practice and personal spiritual experience. In ṣūfism, the word, *ma‘rifa*, described experience-based knowledge.⁵⁶ This type of knowing was related to the human-divine relationship, the dividends of which included becoming the recipient of divine knowledge. The ṣūfī discourse on *ma‘rifa* often invoked the twin metaphors of “Light and Truth.”⁵⁷ Many ṣūfī theorists described *ma‘rifa* as the light of God that enabled the human subject to see and to feel the truth.⁵⁸

As a ṣūfī-jurist, Thānvī discussed *ma‘rifa* in relation to moral obligation (*taklīf*), for it was through embodying sacred law that mystical light shone through the believer’s soulful body. Combining *ma‘rifa* and *taklīf*, Thānvī took seriously the epistemological assumptions of two distinct groups of past Muslim scholars: the *ahl al-zāhir* (the jurists and the theologians) and the *ahl al-bāṭin* (the mystics). The first group defined *‘ilm* as “the acquisition of the form-image of a thing in the intellect” (*al-‘ilm huwa ḥuṣūl ṣūrat*

⁵⁵ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 1:426.

⁵⁶ As Carl W. Ernst notes, “When mystical knowledge was emphasized over traditional learning, the preferred term was *ma‘rifa* or *‘irfān*, meaning a special knowledge or gnosis that transcended ordinary rationality” (*The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* [Boston: Shambhala, 1997], 28).

⁵⁷ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:399.

⁵⁸ By no means was Thānvī the first Muslim thinker to invoke *nur* or luminosity. The trope of *nur* or light appeared most visibly in the Neo-Platonic strands of Muslim intellectual thought.

al-shay' fī'l-'aql).⁵⁹ This definition emphasized an active mind that “acquired” knowledge.⁶⁰ In contrast, the *ahl al-bāṭin* defined knowledge as “the knowledge of God the Most High in terms of His eternal personal attributes” (*'ilm Allāh subḥānahu ṣifat^{an} naḥsiyat^{an} azaliyyat^{an}*).⁶¹ God gifted this knowledge to those who treaded the divine path of love. This definition emphasized an active body that “received” knowledge. Thānvī combined the discursive “acquired” knowledge of the *ahl al-zāhir* with the mystical “received” knowledge of the *ahl al-bāṭin*, grounding his epistemology in *ma'rifa* and *taklīf* (the next section examines these two concepts in greater detail).

Acquired knowledge was only the beginning of knowing, argued Thānvī. He differentiated between “information” (*ma'lūmāt*) and “knowledge” (*'ilm*): “*ma'lūmāt* and *'ilm* are two different things. You can understand their difference by considering how vision and objects of vision are two different things. Compare the case of a weak-sighted person who travels much for sightseeing to one who has clear vision but has seen only a few famous places.”⁶² According to this analogy, the weak-sighted person possessed information, while the clear-sighted person possessed knowledge. For Thānvī, *'ilm* characterized the knowledge of the *sharī'a*-observant person alone: “If knowledge was merely informational expertise, then it could become possible with disobedience as well,

⁵⁹ Al-Sharīf 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-ta'rīfāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1983), 155.

⁶⁰ The word, “acquisition” (*ḥuṣūl*), stems from the tripartite Arabic root *ḥ-ṣ-l*, which signifies: to be set in; to be existent; to come about or to arise; to happen or to occur; to take place; to originate or to derive; to be caused or to be produced; to attain or to obtain; to come into possession of something; to seek; to collect or to recover; and, to receive or to take in. The richness of the word, “acquisition,” points to the myriad ways in which the active mind interacts with objects of knowledge.

⁶¹ Muḥammad A'la b. 'Alī al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn [wa'l-'ulūm]*, ed. Rafīq al-'Ajam (Beirut: Maktabat al-Lubnān, 1996), 2:1229. The added “*wa'l-'ulūm*” in the title is specific to this edition and not a part of the original title.

⁶² Thānvī, *al-'Ilm wa'l-'ulamā'*, 7.

defined “discernment” (*fiqh*). For such Ṣūfī-jurists, disciplined compliance with the divine norms attracted the gift of light, which enabled one to persist in embodying these norms. The consistency in embodiment opened the door of understanding and discernment.

The epistemology of *‘ilm-i dīn* grounded true knowledge in belief and practice, for which the ordinary Muslim needed the expertise of orthodox scholars. Thānvī pressed his audience to consider the example of the early Muslim jurist Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767): “Imām Abū Ḥanīfa did not read many books, but God the Most High had gifted his heart with a light. He would therefore articulate his positions in the most clear and correct way.”⁶⁷ Note how Thānvī undermined the relevance of autodidactic knowledge. True knowledge, he argued, was a gift of God, a light. Thānvī further argued that the fortunate recipient of God’s light was also the recipient of divine protection from worldly harm: “When this light covers one, no feelings of fear remain in the heart, even when fenced in by sharp swords from all sides.”⁶⁸ Thānvī’s metaphysical intensification of knowledge had immense political implications, for this alternative source of enlightenment resisted the colonial demand to “know” and “possess” the world.⁶⁹ At another level, this repurposing of mystical knowledge conveniently served his communalist politics. In his world, only pious and devout Muslims had “authentic” knowledge. He trenchantly argued

⁶⁷ Thānvī, *al-‘Ilm wa’l-‘ulamā’*, 4.

⁶⁸ Thānvī, *al-‘Ilm wa’l-‘ulamā’*, 5.

⁶⁹ Describing the epistemology that undergirded British colonialist definitions of knowledge, Sanjay Seth writes: “A conception of knowledge that posits a knowing subject and an object external to it is also once that makes policing this distinction the very basis of any valid knowledge... This was once a novel conception of knowledge, and the subject it presumed was not found ready-to-hand but rather had to be forged, had to be created through new pedagogic practices, and through the transformations and disciplines enforced by industrialization and capitalism, modern armies, and the modern novel—a process that was complex and difficult, and one that was met with resistance” (Seth, *Subject Lessons*, 5).

that Hindus, Christians, and English-educated Muslims possessed information but not knowledge.

Thānvī's Epistemology: Ma'rifa and Taklīf

While Thānvī did not outline a theory of knowing, I reconstruct his epistemology by assembling and analyzing his assumptions about knowledge. I first consider Thānvī's interpretation of the Adam myth, which reveals a great deal about his take on *'ilm* and *ma'lūmāt*. The Qur'ānic narrative of Adam centers on a ceremonial event before his fall from the heavens to the earth. During this event, God staged a competition of knowledge between Adam and the angels. God presented "the names of all things" (Qur'ān 2:31) before both parties, commanding all participants to reproduce nominal knowledge. Adam succeeded; the angels failed. Commenting on this story, Thānvī said, "This narrative illustrates how unlike the angels, Adam possessed the capacity to remember the names of all things."⁷⁰ Thānvī then explained that the capacity to retain knowledge was of "Adam's essential attributes," and had God granted this capacity to the angels, "they would have ceased to be angels."⁷¹ The essence of the human being, Thānvī argued, was the intellectual capacity to extract, organize, and reproduce knowledge.⁷² In this way, the faculties of memory and understanding characterized the first human being, Adam, from whom all humanity inherited this intellectual capacity. The capacity for *ma'lūmat* was therefore universal.

⁷⁰ Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Ashraf al-tafāsīr*, ed. Muḥammad Taqī 'Uthmānī (Multān: Idāra-i Ta'līfāt-i Ashrafiyya, n.d.), 1:101.

⁷¹ Thānvī, *Ashraf al-tafāsīr*, 1:101.

⁷² This did not imply, however, that the angels had no knowledge at all. Thānvī explained that the Qur'ān used the verb, "to present" (*'araḍa*), and the imperative, "inform" (*anbi*) when talking about the sort of intellectual capacity granted to the angels: "[God commanded the angels] Inform Adam of the names of all things [Qur'ān 2:31]." While angels had the capacity to receive information, argued Thānvī, only the human being had the double capacity to receive *and* reproduce knowledge (Thānvī, *Ashraf al-tafāsīr*, 1:101).

This intellectual capacity (*isti'dād*) went hand-in-hand with moral obligation and responsibility. Many Muslim theologians based the concept of moral obligation in the following Qur'ānic verse: "Indeed, we offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to assume [the burden of the trust] and feared the responsibility; but man assumed [the burden of God's trust]. Indeed, he was utterly unjust and completely ignorant" (Qur'ān, 33:72). This verse contrasted the human being to cosmic entities (the heavens, the earth, and the mountains). The former entities declined shouldering the responsibility of the trust, for they did not possess the intellectual capacity needed for executing God's commandments. Thānvī took seriously the Qur'ānic poetic language that used the feeling of fear to characterize these material entities.

Thānvī argued that it would be nonsensical for God to offer "the trust" to these entities had they been devoid of perception and feeling: "How would these things have opted out of accepting the trust if they lacked perception? Moreover, would they have expressed fear without the capacity of feeling?"⁷³ These existents, explained Thānvī, "had hearts and tongues appropriate to their being" with which they felt God's power and expressed their incapacity to bear moral responsibility.⁷⁴ Thānvī then asked: "Why did the human being accept the responsibility?"⁷⁵ Thānvī took a strange interpretive twist here, one not necessarily warranted by the wording of the verse in question. He said, "If you ponder genuinely you will understand that 'intense love' (*ishq*) is the human being's true distinguishing quality...God the Most High has abundantly endowed the human being with the physical capacity for passion. Other living beings do not have this capacity

⁷³ Thānvī, *Ashraf al-tafāsīr*, 3:333.

⁷⁴ Thānvī, *Ashraf al-tafāsīr*, 3:333.

⁷⁵ Thānvī, *Ashraf al-tafāsīr*, 3:333.

to the same degree.”⁷⁶ He attributed this interpretation to the Persian poet Ḥāfīz and his spiritual master Ḥājī Imdād Allāh.

Thānvī explained that “the trust” (*amāna*) connoted two meanings: intense love (*‘ishq*) and legal obligation (*taklīf tashrī‘ī*). The first meaning of *amāna* was rooted in ṣūfī wisdom—the words of “the gnostics” (*‘ārifīn*)—while the second meaning went back to legal scholars. The ṣūfī definition of *amāna* supplemented the legalist definition of “the trust” as moral obligation.

Thānvī defined *taklīf* as “the acquisition of action with full autonomy.”⁷⁷ To be coerced into performing religious rituals negated the logic of *taklīf*. Thānvī distinguished between obedience (*iṭā‘a*) and obligation (*taklīf*). The former characterized human and non-human devotion to God, while the latter implied an intentional and self-willed worshipping of God. The human being had become morally obliged (*mukallaf*) because he accepted God’s trust, whereas the heavens, the earth, and their non-human inhabitants excused themselves from assuming the burden of responsibility. Thānvī explained the logic of *taklīf* by narrativizing “the trust,” imagining a “once-upon-a-time” exchange between God and all existents:

God said to all creation: “We desire the establishment of our divine commandments! Who is ready to choose for himself becoming obliged to these commandments?” This means that God had offered the trust to entities that possessed the attributes of autonomy and intelligence. In other words, God’s intended audience was a free person, who chose obedience and was not coerced into observing the commandments. This person had the capacity to choose either compliance or disobedience. God continued: “We will draw near to Us those who choose obedience and We will cast away from Our company those who choose disobedience.” The heavens, the earth, the mountains, and all creation trembled upon hearing this

⁷⁶ Thānvī, *Ashraf al-tafāsīr*, 3:333-4.

⁷⁷ Thānvī, *Ashraf al-tafāsīr*, 3:335

onerous demand. The human being, however, accepted this trust, and God made him morally obliged (*mukallaf*).⁷⁸

As is clear from this mythological account of the origins of human moral obligation, Thānvī held that the human being's exceptional capacity to choose submission was due to the perfection of two attributes: intelligence and will. Unwilled obedience characterized all existents except the human being (and the Jinn). The excellence of the human being consisted in choosing obedience to God despite having the capacity to disobey God. This act of choosing obedience made one the recipient of God's light, and granted one true knowledge. Such obedience resulted out of the human being's intense love (*'ishq*) for the divine being.

This wilful obedience to God involved all parts of the human body. Pious, trustful bodies received the gift of divine light, with which they grasped the secrets of *'ilm-i din*. With one's heart and limbs one inhabited the twin discourses of *ṣūfism* and *fiqh*, which guided one to perform the demands of the trust. God's light then illuminated the soulful body of the *mukallaf*. Thānvī argued that there was no other way for God's light to invade the space of subjectivity: As Thānvī said:

Complete devotion to God and constant attention toward him is a condition for God's light to be present in one's being, and this cannot happen without self-reformation...your state of attentiveness toward God indicates that God is attentive toward you. God attends to you through the gesture of a gift, the giving of which expresses divine sovereignty. This gift enables you to become the recipient of divine endowment (*tawfīq*).⁷⁹

This epistemology was full of ontological implications. Embodied knowledge (*'amal*) tethered luminosity to the subject's flesh and blood. This luminous subject assumed an

⁷⁸ Thānvī, *Ashraf al-tafāsīr*, 3:336

⁷⁹ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 23:321.

everyday disciplining of the soulful body by observing *ṣūfī* and *fiqhī* precepts and practices. For Thānvī, bodily practices actualized the subjective potential to receive God's light, repeated rituals ensured the persistence of this grace from God, and transgressions of the divine norms diminished the gift of light, or so goes the story.

Conclusion

As a form of knowledge, *‘ilm-i dīn* consisted of theology, sacred law, and mysticism. As a way of knowing, *‘ilm-i dīn* connoted gnostic insight, which was God's gift of illumination to the responsible person (*mukallaf*). This rendering of religious knowledge was closely related to the inward turn that characterized much of religious life in colonial India. In this context, Muslim orthodox scholars repurposed pre-existing mystical ideas such as gnostic insight and legal ideas such as *taklīf* for particular historical reasons. Thānvī and like-minded scholars were politically discontent after the loss of Muslim sovereignty and statehood in South Asia. Not able to see an active place for themselves in the emerging colonial state, they apparently abandoned active political action and approached religion as a private affair. Yet, their inward turn was not devoid of political implications, for it fulfilled the secular demands of colonial governance and interiorized religious identity (placing religion at the core of one's essential self-definition). By approaching religious belief and practice in private terms, orthodox scholars inhabited subject positions carved out by colonial discourse. At the same time, they exceeded these subject positions, making it hard for us to say that “inward” religion characterized their approach adequately. They mobilized the language of inner experience in the service of broader communal projects that exceeded the colonialist relegation of religion to the private sphere.

The emergence of an “inner-worldly religion of salvation,” according to Max Weber, re-organized the world of religious myths and narratives. The internalization of religion, argued Weber, engendered “practical rationalism, in the sense of the maximization of rational actions as such, the maximization of a methodical systematization of the external conduct of life, and the maximization of the rational organization and institutionalization of mundane social systems, whether monastic communities or theocracies.”⁸⁰ Private religion was a particular response to the so-called disenchantment inherent in modernity. It might be useful to understand private religion as “the internalization of objectification,” a way of coping with disenchantment where the object of mastery was no longer the world, but the human self: one’s interiority.

Thānvī’s epistemology eschewed the mastery of the external world, but embraced self-mastery. *Sharī’a*-minded mysticism enabled him to combine *ma’rifa* and *taḳlīf* in order to discipline the Muslim subject. In this sense, the faculty of will took direction from sacred law and mysticism to regulate and guide the faculty of inclination. The *ma’rifa* of the *mukallaf* achieved precisely this. In a context where colonial authorities demanded the locals to “acquire” modern knowledge, Thānvī’s *‘ilm-i dīn* offered an alternative to enlightened modernity. By embodying law *and* mysticism—by obeying heteronomy with the heart and the limbs—the Muslima prepared herself to “receive” divine knowledge. For Thānvī, the Muslima body did not need to turn toward the West for epistemic nourishment. With growing tensions between colonial rule and local intellectuals after the First World War, Thānvī’s alternative enlightenment appeared

⁸⁰ Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 177.

attractive to even some Muslim modernists. A case in point was the Urdu journalist and Qur'ān commentator 'Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī (1892-1977), a recovering modernist who searched for an Islamic alternative to the European Enlightenment. Daryābādī posed his lingering questions about orthodox Islamic beliefs and practices to Thānvī in a long series of correspondence from 1928 until the latter's death in 1943. In the early 1950s, Daryābādī published a remarkable memoir about his impressions of the ṣūfī master. In the next chapter, I examine Daryābādī's memorable book about Thānvī in order to explore the theme of subjectivity in Muslim orthodoxy.

Chapter 3. The Script of Subjectivity: The Passionate Self and Rational Discipline

In the late 1920s the pan-Islamic political activist, Qur’ān commentator, and renowned Urdu journalist ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī (1892-1977) set out to find an ideal ṣūfī master who could address his ethical quandaries and religious questions.¹ Trained in European philosophy and psychology, Daryābādī had become disillusioned with the values of the Enlightenment (*roshan khayālī*).² He searched for ways of life and styles of thinking that bridged the gaps between reason and emotion, modernity and tradition, and intellectual freedom and communal conformity. His pursuit of spiritual truth brought him to the North Indian towns of Deoband and then to Thāna Bhawan. At these centers of Muslim learning and spirituality, he approached orthodox theologians in order to address his lingering agnosticism and uncertainty about religious teachings. Daryābādī began corresponding with Thānvī in 1927 and continued to do so until the latter’s death in 1943.

Thānvī referred to his relationship with Daryābādī as “friendship” (*dostī*), a mode of interaction he embodied with reference to inquisitive interlocutors.³ Thānvī conceived of *dostī* as dispositional affinity between two persons. He deployed *dostī* to converse in mutually pleasant terms with Muslim thinkers from various ideological orientations.⁴ The Daryābādī-Thānvī *dostī* unfolded in the physical space of Thānvī’s ṣūfī lodge and the

¹ ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī’s biographical details can be found in his autobiography, *Āp bītī*, with an introduction by Abū’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadvī (Karachi: Majlis-i Nashriyāt-i Islām, 1996).

² Daryābādī uses the Urdu expression, *roshan khayālī*, to refer to Enlightenment values. See ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat: nuqūsh wa ta’assurāt* (Lahore: Maktaba Madaniyya, n.d.), 65.

³ Thānvī states this understanding of friendship in a 1930 letter to Daryābādī. See Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 125.

⁴ As a matter of principle, Thānvī did not engage in public debates about religious doctrines and practices. He primarily interacted with people in his capacity as a ṣūfī master: “The task of the ṣūfī master is not to engage in debates with his disciples, but to engage in their treatment” (Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 9:54). Thānvī employed a friendly mode of interaction with those Muslim intellectuals who did not take the initiatory ṣūfī pledge with him, but still wanted to converse with him in a manner he deemed respectful. Friendship, in this context, was quite a formal and controlled relationship.

textual space of their frequent correspondence. The fascinating story of Daryābādī's epistolary and face-to-face friendship with Thānvī casts light on niches of orthodox Muslim subjectivity and sociality uncharted by scholarship on Islam in colonial South Asia.

Daryābādī tells us the story of this friendship in his 1952 memoir-type book titled *Ḥakīm al-ummat: nuqūsh wa ta'assurāt* (*The Sage of the Community: Depictions and Impressions*).⁵ The book's title pays tribute to Thānvī's sagacity and practical wisdom. This lengthy memoir chronicles Daryābādī's observations of Thānvī's everyday routine. *The Sage of the Community* records the author's extended correspondence with Thānvī on matters ranging from Qur'ānic exegesis to ṣūfī teaching and technique. Although Daryābādī's account is sometimes sensational, it differs from the semi-hagiographical Urdu biographies of Thānvī. Daryābādī admits of his heretical background and elaborates the importance of agnosticism in theological issues. He does not shy away from providing details of his perspectival differences from Thānvī and other orthodox theologians. While he lauds Thānvī as “the Rūmī and Rāzī of modern India” and “the Ghazālī of our age,” he maintains his independent-mindedness in his appraisal of Sunnī orthodox positions.⁶

Daryābādī's story is an exquisite representation of numerous intellectual concerns shared by Muslim thinkers of various ideological orientations in colonial modernity. At the heart of this story is the question: what are the ethical resources within Islamic

⁵ ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat: nuqūsh wa ta'assurāt* (Lahore: Maktaba Madaniyya, n.d.).

⁶ Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 64; 119. Daryābādī attributes this “independent-mindedness” to his English education (*Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 50). An example of this is Daryābādī's continued uncertainty about Thānvī's anathematization of the Shī'as. See Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 234-38.

discursive traditions that can ameliorate Muslim subjectivity and sociality in situations of personal and political crises? For Daryābādī, Thānvī's thinking and everyday behavior elaborated many praiseworthy resources. In this chapter, I employ Daryābādī's narrative in order to explore how tradition, especially Thānvī's orthodoxy, spoke to recovering modernists as they sought alternative ontologies, ethics, and politics in colonial India. Moreover, I document several aspects of Thānvī's take on subjectivity: his discipline, his particular teaching on human inclinations and passion, and his insights regarding faith and freedom.

Daryābādī's turn to Thānvī documents a reaction of Muslim modernists who had lost faith in the egalitarian and emancipating promises of the European Enlightenment. His turn to Thānvī designates the moment in Indo-Muslim history when the pro-British intellectual school of Muslim modernism had failed the political aspirations of anti-colonial Muslim modernists. This moment marked a phase of transition within Indo-Muslim modernism. Another example of this phenomenon was the advanced career of the celebrated Muslim poet and philosopher Sir Muḥammad Iqbāl (1877-1938). Iqbāl's last book of poetry, *Ẓarb-i Kalīm (The Rod of Moses)*, delivered a trenchant critique of Western territorial and cultural imperialism.⁷ In the last decade of his life, Iqbāl expanded his exposure to traditionally trained theologians such as the Deobandī Ḥadīth scholar

⁷ Muḥammad Iqbāl, *Ẓarb-i Kalīm: ya'nī i'lān-i jang dawr-e ḥāẓir ke khilāf* (Lahore: Munirah Bano Begum, 1941). The book's subtitle translates as, "in other words, a call to arms against the modern world." For its English translation, see Muḥammad Iqbāl, *The Rod of Moses: Versified English Translation of Iqbāl's Zarb-i Kalim*, trans. Syed Akbar Ali Shah (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1983). According to Iqbal Singh Sevea, Muḥammad Iqbāl had "anticipated later third-worldist and post-colonial critiques of colonialism by figures such as Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, and Jean-Paul Sartre" (*The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012], 81). Sevea claims also that Iqbāl "conceived of colonialism as a totalitarian exercise of power that extended beyond physical domination into the realms of culture and ideology...Iqbal envisioned that his main role as an intellectual was to resist colonial hegemony and to help shape the re-empowerment of the Muslims and the East" (*The Political Philosophy of Iqbal*, 92).

Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī (d. 1933) and the Muslim historian Sayyid Sulaymān Nadvī (d. 1953).⁸

Like Iqbāl, Daryābādī turned to orthodox theologians when he could no longer detect the boundaries between European thought traditions and British colonialism. Daryābādī's correspondence with Thānvī captures Muslim modernists' anxieties about religious identity in colonial India. In order to unfetter themselves from the intellectual shackles of colonial modernity and reclaim their disavowed Muslim identities, thinkers such as Daryābādī searched for modes of thought and action that were at once anti-colonial and Islamic. They sought theories and practices of the self that were responsive to modern realities but also steeped in the Muslim discursive traditions of theology, jurisprudence, and mysticism. While Daryābādī turned to numerous Muslim theologians in his search for an alternative subjectivity and ethics, he claimed that Thānvī eased his existential worries and quenched his intellectual thirst. Daryābādī spoke of this judgment in his autobiography: "No words can capture the religious, spiritual, and ethical benefit I reaped from Mawlānā Thānvī."⁹

Daryābādī sought a religious subjectivity that was attuned to multiple canons of morality: divine revelation, pure and practical reason, and personal comportment. For Daryābādī, Thānvī had theorized effectively the relationship between personal inclination (*ṭabī'at*) and the authority of reason (*'aql*) and revelation (*waḥy*). Thānvī conceived of these three sources of moral law in hierarchical terms: at top was revelation, followed by reason and personal inclination. According to Thānvī, the Muslim moral subject was

⁸ Akhtar Rāhī, *Iqbāl Sulaimān Nadvī kī naẓar meṅ* (Lahore: Bazm-i Iqbāl, 1978).

⁹ Daryābādī, *Āp bīṭī*, 259.

bound to revealed and rational norms, but could also embody the singularity of her inclination in areas left ungoverned by revelation and reason. Thānvī taught that the embodiment of revealed law and rational law was voluntary (*ikhtiyārī*), even if one's habitation of these norms sometimes happened subconsciously. The embodiment of inclination, on the other hand, was not always a conscious decision. In our daily lives, we are not always active agents of our thoughts and actions. Our ideas and practices sometimes surprise us. Thānvī called these areas of ordinary existence “the unintentional” (*ghayr ikhtiyārī*). In everyday relationships and interactions, the moral subject followed the stable or erratic dictates of her inclination. Thānvī theorized this affective dimension of human subjectivity using the following expressions: *ṭabī‘at* (personal inclination), *fiṭrat* (nature), *zawq* (aesthetic sensibility), and *maylān* (tendency). These expressions connoted the area of embodied life and everyday experience where each believer appropriated revelation and reason according to the demands of her singularity.

Thānvī's theory of subjectivity repurposed pre-existing discourses on moral responsibility. He taught that a Muslim had the freedom to believe and to reason, for believing and reasoning were intentional acts. Matters of feeling, however, were not seen in the same way, for feelings were enmeshed in corporeal designs. Feelings betrayed affective subjectivity and resisted the jurisdiction of intentions and decisions. Even orthodox believers had no control over moments wherein they *felt* unbelief or scepticism. They could not be held responsible for these unintended intrusions of “strange thoughts.”

Thānvī therefore insisted that in areas left ungoverned by reason and revelation, acting according to one's affective disposition was acceptable with the caveat that the dictates of disposition conformed to the revealed and rational norms. Daryābādī

understood Thānvī's exposition of moral responsibility to be of great ethical value for Muslims in colonial modernity, as it affirmed a substantial area of knowledge and action wherein believers could creatively and critically engage the traditions of reason and revelation. In *The Sage of the Community*, Daryābādī recorded the quotidian details of Thānvī's life, which can help us create a cartography of the moral values the ṣūfī master cherished, the ethical standards he taught, the normative actions he embodied, his structures of feeling, among the other features of lived experience that make up subjectivity.

While Daryābādī's account provides profound reflections on Thānvī's ethical thought, it does not capture how Thānvī disciplined the affective dimensions of human subjectivity. In addition to examining Thānvī's theory of subjectivity vis-à-vis Daryābādī, I also examine Thānvī's deep attachment with discipline. I show how Thānvī's asceticism and admonition regulated affects such as intense passion and love. His high discipline served historical purposes; it was the "traditional" alternative to Victorian discipline. I will therefore contextualize Thānvī's strategy of self-discipline. Before we examine Thānvī's theory of subjectivity with the help of Daryābādī's memoir, *The Sage of the Community*, a biographical account of Daryābādī is in order.

Subjectivity in Transition: 'Abd Al-Mājid Daryābādī

Born in 1892, Daryābādī hailed from a devout Sunnī family of North India. His hometown of Daryābād was forty-five miles east of the famed city of Lucknow, known for its centuries-old institutions of the cultural arts and Islamic learning. As an adolescent he read widely and wrote religiously. He studied the Qur'ān and observed everyday Muslim rituals. In 1908 he left home to pursue his postsecondary education at Lucknow's

Canning College. Daryābādī studied a diverse curriculum, including Arabic, European philosophy, and social sciences. He immersed himself in this cultured city's libraries and intellectual circles. His study of psychological sociology in particular presented serious challenges to his orthodox upbringing.

Daryābādī took peculiar interest in consulting the burgeoning works of Anglophone psychology. It was not long before he encountered the ideas of the British freethinker George Drysdale (1824-1904). Daryābādī enthusiastically read Drysdale's *Elements of Social Science, or Physical, Sexual, and Natural Religion*.¹⁰ Based on Daryābādī's retrospective analysis, the book shook him up: "This was no book. It was a tunnel laden with dynamite."¹¹ In this text Drysdale championed "physical religion" and forcefully argued against "spiritual religion." He castigated Christianity for the global excess of "spiritual religion" and the widespread doctrine of the superiority of the soul over the body. Drysdale valorized human sensuality and all things material: "The man who has not paid equal attention to physical pursuits, and to the study of the human body in its varied phases of health and disease, must be a spiritualist, and his unequal knowledge of the different parts of our nature, while it shows his preference for the one, will bias and falsify all his views on man as a whole."¹² Such ideas facilitated Daryābādī's departure from his orthodox upbringing.

Following this exposure to and immersion in Anglophone psychology, Daryābādī discontinued his devotional practices, started doubting his religious beliefs, and embraced

¹⁰ He mentioned specifically George Drysdale's *Elements of Social Science, or Physical, Sexual, and Natural Religion: An Exposition of the True Cause and Only Cure of the Three Primary Social Evils: Poverty, Prostitution, and Celibacy* (London: E. Truelove, 1882). See Daryābādī, *Āp bītī*, 234.

¹¹ Daryābādī, *Āp bītī*, 234.

¹² Drysdale, *Elements of Social Science*, 6.

a secular academic life. He tells us about his turn to European philosophy during this period of personal transformation: “Heresy (*ilhād*) had overcome my beliefs, and so I read the works of those authors who were either heretical or semi-heretical.”¹³ These authors included the books of “Bacon, Hume, Locke, Mill, Hegel, Spencer, Huxley, and Darwin.”¹⁴ Daryābādī spent the decade between 1908 and 1918 mesmerized by “materialism, agnosticism, and skepticism” (*mādiyyat lā-adriyyat aur tashkīk*).¹⁵ During this decade, Daryābādī contributed to the indigenization of European philosophy and psychology in colonial India. He published an Urdu translation of the Anglo-Irish philosopher George Berkeley’s *Three Dialogues* and an Urdu monograph titled *Falsafa-yi jazabāt* (*The Philosophy of Emotions*).¹⁶ At around the same time, the London-based publisher T. F. Unwin released his first English book, *The Psychology of Leadership*.¹⁷ These literary accomplishments brought Daryābādī renown among North Indian Hindu, Muslim, and English liberal intellectuals.

Daryābādī’s foray into heresy did not last more than a decade. He soon claimed that belief in the European Enlightenment was untenable in the colonial Indian context. After the First World War, Daryābādī turned to theosophy, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. He perused the writings of the Hindu theologian Bhagwan Das (1869-1958) and the leading intellectual of the Theosophical Society Annie Besant (1847-

¹³ Daryābādī, *Āp bītī*, 127.

¹⁴ Daryābādī, *Āp bītī*, 127.

¹⁵ Daryābādī, *Āp bītī*, 247.

¹⁶ ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī, *Falsafa-yi jazabāt* (Aurangabad: Anjuman Taraqqi-yi Urdu, [1914]; 1920).

¹⁷ Abdul Majid, *The Psychology of Leadership* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1915).

1933).¹⁸ Deeply inspired by their insistence on spiritualism, Daryābādī turned to the anticolonial teachings of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948).¹⁹ In the late 1910s, Daryābādī experienced another radical transformation. He no longer retained much respect for European philosophy after reading the aforementioned luminaries of Eastern spirituality. “I came to realize,” he wrote, “how the interpretations of Western materialists are in no way the last word on reality. This world offers multiple sound and appealing interpretations. The spiritual world is neither a joke nor unfounded. It is very much real, solid.”²⁰ Thinkers such as Das, Besant, and Gandhi mobilized the category, “Eastern spirituality,” in order to voice their political concerns and to demand recognition of non-European modes of being enlightened. In a similar fashion, Daryābādī sought acknowledgement for his newfound inclination toward spiritualism: “These teachings are worthy of respect and reverence. In terms of depth and profundity, the teachings of the Buddha and Krishna are not inferior but superior to the teachings of Mill and Spencer.”²¹ He familiarized himself with Western criticisms of modernity and materialism, such as those voiced by the English art critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) and the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910).²²

Daryābādī’s disenchantment with modern education and values took place amidst rising anti-colonial activity in India during the 1910s and the 1920s. In October 1920 he

¹⁸ Daryābādī, *Āp bītī*, 246. On Bhagwan Das, see D.P.S. Khanna, *Dr. Bhagwan Das as a Social Thinker* (Delhi: Shree Publishing House, 1983). On Annie Besant, see Anne Taylor, *Annie Besant: A Biography* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹⁹ Daryābādī, *Āp bītī*, 247.

²⁰ Daryābādī, *Āp bītī*, 247.

²¹ Daryābādī, *Āp bītī*, 247.

²² Daryābādī recommended these two authors among others to Sayyid Abū’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadvī. See Nadvī, *Purāney chirāgh* (Lucknow: Maktaba-i Firdaus, 1975): 2:157.

read the Aḥmadī Muslim scholar Muḥammad ‘Alī’s English translation of the Qur’ān.²³ Daryābādī’s study of the Muslim scripture brought him to another threshold of self-transformation. He began reclaiming his Muslim identity and turned to the pan-Islamic scholar Muḥammad ‘Alī Jawhar (1878-1931).²⁴ Daryābādī began writing for the latter’s journal *Hamdard*. By the mid-1920s, Daryābādī had become an active member of the Khilāfat Movement, a massive coalition between Hindus and Muslims that opposed British imperial policies, including Britain’s opposition to the Ottoman Empire.

Daryābādī became re-enchanted with religious narratives amidst these political crises. He now re-directed his doubt and scepticism toward Enlightenment values, which he did not differentiate from the morals of India’s colonizers. Daryābādī and his fellow activists criticized the post-WWI policies of the British government. With Atatürk’s abolishment of the Caliphate in 1924, these pan-Islamic activists had lost any remnant of hope in colonial modernity. In the aftermath of the Khilāfat Movement, activists such as Daryābādī began looking for alternatives, including orthodox ones.

Daryābādī’s Turn to Thānvī

In 1925 Daryābādī founded the weekly Urdu literary and religious journal *Sach* (*Truth*). The journal’s title spoke to the public role Daryābādī imagined for himself: to articulate and disseminate *the* truth. In his case, the truth appeared on the horizons of Qur’ānic teaching and the Prophet Muḥammad’s normative practice (*sunna*). With this weekly organ Daryābādī established himself as a leading Urdu journalist and religious intellectual of North India. Daryābādī began defending traditional interpretations of

²³ Daryābādī, *Āp bītī*, 254-55.

²⁴ Daryābādī, *Āp bītī*, 258.

doctrines and rituals. In the late 1920s and the early 1930s Daryābādī fought a prolonged polemical battle with a leading Muslim liberal thinker, the prominent Urdu novelist and poet Niyāz Fatehpūrī (1884-1966).²⁵ Fatehpūrī advocated ethical religion and was a forceful critic of faith-based fundamentalism and Sunnī traditionalism. On behalf of traditionalist scholars, Daryābādī spearheaded the refutation of Fatehpūrī. At about the same time, Daryābādī began his search for a theologian who could answer his own puzzling questions about orthodox beliefs and rituals. Daryābādī thus turned to the Muslim theologian and Ḥadīth teacher Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī (1874-1956).²⁶

Like Thānvī, Madanī was also a student of the famed Ḥadīth scholar Maḥmūd Ḥasan Deobandī (1851-1920). Madanī had followed Maḥmūd Ḥasan in his plots to overthrow British rule in India. In 1916 the British authorities intercepted their communications and arrested them on charges of sedition. The British transported Madanī and Maḥmūd Ḥasan from the Ḥijāz in Arabia to a prison camp in Malta. During the four years of their confinement, Madanī took care of the ailing Maḥmūd Ḥasan and deepened his pre-existing intellectual bond with his teacher. Madanī inherited his teacher's esteemed position of Muslim political leadership when Maḥmūd Ḥasan passed away in Delhi a few months after being released from imprisonment. Contrary to Madanī's political enthusiasm, Thānvī advocated pacifism with reference to colonial rule. Thānvī argued that Muslims were not strong enough to bear the consequences of active resistance. He also disliked native political solidarity across confessional lines. While I

²⁵ Juhi Shahin, *The War Within Islam: Niyaz Fatehpuri's Struggle Against Islamic Fundamentalism* (Lahore: Ferozsons, 2009). This is the author's revision of her 2007 McGill University MA thesis titled, "Niyaz Fatehpuri and the 'Ulama': Criticisms and Debates (1922-1966)."

²⁶ On Madanī, see Barbara D. Metcalf, *Husain Ahmad Madani: The Jihad for Islam and India's Freedom* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009).

examine this political debate within orthodoxy in a later chapter, here it suffices to note that the political differences between these two scholars did not negate their shared devotion to Sunnī orthodoxy. On the contrary, they may have taken different approaches toward actualizing similar social visions. As Metcalf points out, “Substantively, the positions of Madani and Thanawi were in fact not that far apart: both shared the historic premise that the religious and political spheres were essentially separate and that society was comprised of religiously bounded ‘communities.’ Both believed, most fundamentally, that the traditionalist *‘ulama*—not the modernist, not the Islamist—alone spoke for Islam and alone were entrusted with the Islamic education and guidance that were at the heart of Muslim well-being.”²⁷

Daryābādī encountered Madanī at a 1925 Khilāfat Movement meeting in Kanpur.²⁸ The Deobandī Ḥadīth professor had impressed Daryābādī with his ability to blend religious and political concerns into concrete actions. Daryābādī considered taking Madanī as his ṣūfī master. At around the same time, Daryābādī also encountered Thānvī’s writings on mysticism.²⁹ To the Daryābādī of the 1920s, Thānvī was too strict a ṣūfī-jurist: “I took him to be an uncompromising stickler of Muslim sacred law (*sharī‘a*)...who was too quick to reproach his disciples.”³⁰ Daryābādī later recanted his negative assessment of Thānvī.

On the insistence of a close friend, Daryābādī started reading Thānvī’s writings on spirituality and the master-disciple inter-subjective dynamic. By the time he had finished Thānvī’s tract, *Qaṣd al-sabīl* (*The Goal of the Ṣūfī Path*), he reported a radical

²⁷ Metcalf, *Husain Ahmad Madani*, 121.

²⁸ Daryābādī, *Āp bītī*, 258-59.

²⁹ Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 10.

³⁰ Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 9.

transformation in his assessment of Sunnī orthodoxy and a newfound respect for Thānvī.³¹ He confessed: “My ignorance appeared before me like a mirror, as if everything I had read, heard, or known about ṣūfism until now was mere fantasy...I could not help but scold myself for not reading these books earlier.”³² Daryābādī then visited Thānvī’s Lucknow-based biographer and disciple, ‘Azīz al-Ḥasan Ghawrī. The latter encouraged Daryābādī to write to Thānvī directly. Daryābādī was quite nervous at the prospect of establishing contact with the master: “Our political differences, especially his opposition to the Khilāfat Movement, had stung my heart like a thorn...but I asked myself: where can you find a person of vision better than him? This did not mean that I would close my eyes and follow him blindly.”³³ Daryābādī mustered enough confidence to initiate correspondence with Thānvī: “I began writing, often pausing and thinking, somewhat terrified as well, but nonetheless courageous enough to express my mind.”³⁴

Daryābādī wrote, “I am a man of English learning who had fallen prey to the misguidance and heretical influences of Western philosophy. In my past life I experienced the misery of harboring irreverent ideas about God and the Prophet

³¹ See Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Qaṣd al-sabīl ilā al-mawlā al-jalīl*, ed. Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘ (Karachi: Idārat al-Ma‘ārif, n.d.). In this text, Thānvī summarized his general advice regarding *taṣawwuf* in ten points, which were interspersed among sections written specifically for various audiences: an initiated disciple (*murīd*); a non-‘*ālim*’ layperson who has to labor for his subsistence; a non-‘*ālim*’ layperson who is free of material concerns; ‘*ulamā*’ preoccupied with material concerns; ‘*ulamā*’ who are free of material concerns; non-‘*ulamā*’ men in general; non-‘*ulamā*’ women in general; and, persons who follow fixed regimens of ṣūfī ritual. Thānvī’s ten counsels pertained to: (1) the essence of Ṣūfism; (2) the method of becoming a ṣūfī initiate; (3) the pre-requisites of a sound ṣūfī master (*pīr*); (4) the purpose of becoming a disciple (*murīd*); (5) the relationship between Ṣūfism and Sharī‘a; (6) the moral norms characteristic of a *murīd*; (7) the method of coping with anxiety-ridden concerns; (8) the significance of being dutiful toward all intentional acts; (9) popular customs prevalent among some ṣūfīs; and, (10) general advices. In sections written specifically for laypersons, Thānvī emphasized how *taṣawwuf* does not entail monasticism or asceticism. He argued that *taṣawwuf* aimed at restoring the balance between fulfilling one’s spiritual and material needs.

³² Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 11.

³³ Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 11.

³⁴ Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 11.

Muḥammad. After this prolonged time, I have been given a second chance to return to the faith of Islam. I attribute this blessing to my reading of Rūmī's *Masnavī*, even though I do not claim to comprehend it fully."³⁵ Daryābādī took inspiration from Rūmī's Persian poetry, the spiritual echoes of which reverberated in colonial India through its many Urdu translations and commentaries.³⁶ We know from Daryābādī's own telling that he had studied Thānvī's *Kalīd-i Masnavī*, an extended Urdu commentary on Rūmī's masterpiece.³⁷

Daryābādī continued his letter to Thānvī by expressing remorse at his past life: "The moral errors of my past are too many to recollect. My greatest concern is therefore the present moment. God truly knows that I am still quite far away from the straight path. I have not yet had the privilege of taking the initiatory pledge with a ṣūfī master, nor have I spent any significant time in the company of a spiritual guide."³⁸ Daryābādī hoped for salvation in the afterlife and identified institutional ṣūfism as the path toward this goal. His salvific anxiety also marked a break with his past. His letter to Thānvī betrayed a desire for a different self and a new roadmap for the future. This letter expressed his wish for a relationship not yet initiated. Before he could arrive at this new scene of subjectivity, he first had to amend his old self. He was ready, again, to let another Other

³⁵ Daryābādī, *Hakīm al-ummat*, 11-12.

³⁶ See, for example, the following works: Muḥammad Nazīr 'Arshī's *Miftāh al-'Ulūm: Sharḥ Masnavī-i Mawlānā Rūm* (Lahore: Tājran Kutub, 1923-37); Payrahān-i Yūsufī: *Tarjumah-i Masnavī-i Mawlavī-i Ma'navī* (Lucknow: Naval Kishor, 1947); Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān Rāsikh's *Masnavī Mawlānā Rūm* (Delhi: Hindustan Printing Press, 1925); Intizār 'Alī Shāh's *Bāgh-i Iram* (Bombay: Maṭba'-i Karīmī, 1915); Firozuddīn's *Ilhām-i Manzūm: Tarjumah-i Urdu Masnavī Mawlānā Rūm* (Lahore: Firoz Printing, 1930); Mirzā 'Iṣmatullāh Beg's *Zarrīn Hikāyat: Masnavī-i Mawlavī-i Ma'navī* (Hyderabad: 'Ahdafirīn Press, 1940); Sayyid Hāshimī Farīdabādī's *Hikāyat-i Rumī* (Delhi: Anjuman Taraqqī-i Urdu, 1940); 'Abd al-Mālik 'Arvī, *Intikhāb-i Dīvān-i Shams Tabrez* (Gorakhpur: Ivān-i Ishā'at, 1931).

³⁷ Ashraf 'Alī Thanvī, *Kalīd-i Masnavī* (Multan: Idara-i Ta'līfat-i Ashrafiyya, n.d.).

³⁸ Daryābādī, *Hakīm al-ummat*, 12.

enter into the echelons of his interiority. The confession-style language of ṣūfism enabled him to mark a moment of personal transition.

In this letter, Daryābādī continued to seek authority outside of autonomy: “I don’t think I can find an advisor and a guide better than you. I recently studied your writings on ṣūfism—my heart exploded—I had mistaken you to be a religious scholar alone. I now appreciate your mastery of the mystical sciences. Please forgive me for saying that your political positions are still troubling to my mind.”³⁹ The image of an *exploding heart* hints at Daryābādī’s intense affective attachment with salvation. Thānvī’s printed works oriented Daryābādī’s pre-existing salvific anxiety toward established techniques of ṣūfī therapy, including submitting oneself before a ṣūfī master. In this context Daryābādī acknowledged how he could not reduce Thānvī’s teachings to “religion,” for what he read was brimming with psychological insight, ethical imperatives, practical philosophy, and social commentary. Thānvī’s teaching appeared as highly attractive to this recovering modernist, who nonetheless could not comprehend Thānvī’s apolitical politics. Daryābādī had revealed a great deal about himself to Thānvī. This revelation, however, did not mean that he had lost all former grounding. He continued his prior political affiliations even after years of intellectual intimacy with Thānvī. The latter seemed not to mind given that these differences concerned matters of inclination and not matters of reason or doctrine.⁴⁰

³⁹ Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 12.

⁴⁰ Daryābādī appropriated the master-discipline relationship into a mode of interaction and friendship that was useful for him. He showed immense respect to Thānvī, but continued to think independently. Daryābādī’s approach can be compared to past ṣūfī figures such as Aḥmad Zarrūq (d. 1493) and ‘Alī Muttaqī (d. 1567). For more on these two figures and how they struck a balance between passivity and activism, see Scott Kugle, “Die Before Dying: Activism and Passivity in ṣūfī Ethics.” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 26 (2006): 113-155.

According to Daryābādī's narration, he despatched this letter to Thānvī on 18 November 1927. Thanks to His Majesty's efficient colonial postal service, Daryābādī received a reply by 25 November 1927. I cite Thānvī's answer in its entirety in order to provide an illustration of how his behavioral discipline bled into his textual practices:

From Ashraf 'Alī. Peace be upon you.

Your straightforwardness brought joy to my heart. I beseech God to grant you understanding of the reality of things. It is unnecessary for me to reply at length to all of your particular points. My following answers therefore address only the important queries in your letter:

- 1) What are your criteria for choosing a ṣūfī master? How do you understand the commitments involved in taking the initiatory pledge (*bay'at*)? It is important to be clear in these matters, as your criteria will enable you to choose your spiritual guide.
- 2) What is the purpose of your planned visit to Thana Bhawan? I need to know this so I can determine if we can actually fulfill the aim of your visit. It is also necessary for you to inform me if you plan to remain silent or to express your opinions in my company.
- 3) You expressed concern about curing your spiritual condition. This can only happen after you pledge your loyalty to a spiritual guide.

With peace from Thana Bhawan.⁴¹

Thānvī first emphasized to Daryābādī the significance of conceptual and methodological clarity in pursuing a ṣūfī relationship. Although the master-disciple dynamic was essentially an authoritarian relationship, it commenced with the disciple's own initiative. This authoritarian relationship was grounded in personal freedom. Thānvī asked Daryābādī to do his research and to make sure he knew the implications of his desired form of relationality. Thānvī also inquired about Daryābādī's planned visit, especially if the latter intended to speak during this trial engagement. In his ṣūfī lodge, Thānvī did not permit first-time visitors to address the ṣūfī master directly. He emphasized that most of their questions would be answered if they remained patient and

⁴¹ Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 13-14.

stayed aboard as mere observers. A hopeful candidate's inability to remain silent in this trial period revealed his psychic disposition to Thānvī. At times, the master turned away people who were unable to observe the rules of his ṣūfī lodge. Thānvī and his institution were in fact surrounded by strict measures of discipline, which contributed to Daryābādī's apprehension about approaching Thānvī.

Daryābādī replied to this initial letter and received another systematic but succinct response from Thānvī. The latter's fresh answers surprised Daryābādī, upsetting his image of the traditionally trained clergy as non-rational and prone to passion. Consequently, Daryābādī re-examined his views of traditional Muslim scholars, and Thānvī in particular: "Mawlānā Thānvī was not merely a mystic (*ṣūfī*), a gnostic (*ʿārif*), and an ascetic (*zāhid*), but also a dialectical theologian (*mutakallim*), a rational philosopher (*ma'qūlī*), and most importantly of all, a reformer (*muṣliḥ*) and a teacher (*mu'allim*)."⁴² Daryābādī appreciated Thānvī's versatile inhabitation of Islamic discursive traditions. The ṣūfī master straddled the discourses of theology and philosophy, to name two bodies of knowledge of exceptional interest to Daryābādī. At the same time, Thānvī was a social reformer and embodied honed pedagogical skills.

Thānvī's Disciplined Subjectivity

In the following years, Daryābādī continued his correspondence with Thānvī. Although he had visited Thānvī's ṣūfī lodge in Madanī's company earlier in 1928, his first serious sojourn in Thānvī's ṣūfī lodge took place in December 1928. During this visit, Thānvī's daily routine impressed Daryābādī: "I witnessed first-hand Mawlānā Thānvī's organized and disciplined lifestyle. He was meticulous about his daily schedule

⁴² Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 15.

and had a fixed time for everything. Before the mid-day prayer (*zuhr*), he entertained his special guests, including fellow scholars and persons of repute. After the mid-day prayer, he counselled the general attendants of his *ṣūfī* lodge.”⁴³ Daryābādī’s remarks shed light on Thānvī’s austere self-discipline, details of which appear in his biographies, collected sermons, and recorded conversations. Thānvī observed rigorous self-laid principles in his daily interactions, correspondence, diet, and living arrangement. He was quite cautious about matters of personal property and stored his personal belongings in an ordered manner. A slight reordering of his things was cause enough to upset his mood. He was also strict in interpersonal relations; minor instances of cacography in letters from disciples angered him. While some would see his obsession with order as a symptom of neurosis, he attributed his penchant for discipline to God: “God had gifted my disposition to conform to sound principles.”⁴⁴ Thānvī claimed that such discipline was needed in order to fulfil his intellectual and reformist tasks. He attributed his success in prolific publishing and extensive travelling to his time management skills. His sense of duty and everyday consistency was on full display in his *ṣūfī* lodge. For Daryābādī, Thānvī’s self-discipline was an illustration of the *ṣūfī* master’s brilliance in practical philosophy.

The English word *discipline* connotes a wide range of inter-related meanings. *The Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that discipline can refer to an ecclesiastical punishment for an unruly person, a body of knowledge, meticulous instruction and training, methodical behavior, or preservation of the normative order.⁴⁵ Thus far, I have used “discipline” as shorthand for a constellation of concepts used by Thānvī: order

⁴³ Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 43.

⁴⁴ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 2:65.

⁴⁵ “discipline, n.” *OED Online*. June 2014. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com> (accessed August 27, 2014).

(*naẓm*), organization (*intizām*) proper etiquette (*salīqa*), principles (*uṣūl*), reform (*iṣlāḥ*), rules (*qawā'id*), education (*ta'līm*), tutelage (*tarbiyya*), edification (*ta'dīb*), admonition (*tanbīh*), “forbidding and prohibiting” (*rok-tok*), and “rebuking and rebuffing” (*dānt dābat*). The meanings of these Urdu words are covered within the semantic orbit of “discipline.” Thānvī employed these words in various registers and argued that his penchant for order and discipline mirrored religious rituals: “All of religion presupposes order (*naẓm*). Take for example the ordered devotional practices, such as the daily prayer and fasting.”⁴⁶

While self-discipline characterized the practices of past Muslim mystics, Thānvī repurposed this strategy in very particular ways. Within Islamic mysticism, self-discipline was a strategy used to banish the world for the time being so that a certain rearrangement of interiority became possible. As Marshall Hodgson put it, “When one has oneself under control, one can, for the moment, cease needing to worry what anyone else will think of one’s acts.”⁴⁷ This type of self-control was required only “for the moment,” as numerous prophetic reports forbade the total abandonment of the world, an existential posture the Prophet compared to Christian monasticism.⁴⁸ Thānvī internalized the modern demand for the human being to master objects; his primary object being interiority. He deployed a *sharī'a*-minded mystical technique to discipline himself, his disciples, and the popular matrices of belief and ritual prevalent in Indian Islam. In Thānvī, we meet a scholar who was at home in the modern world, with its emphasis on objectification, individualism, mastery, reason, and discipline.

⁴⁶ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 9:15.

⁴⁷ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:398.

⁴⁸ As Hodgson says, “Many Sufis taught that ideally any sort of total withdrawal from social relations ought to be a temporary discipline rather than a permanent status” (*The Venture of Islam*, 2:205).

Discipline in Thānvī's context connoted two broad meanings: prudence and admonition. The first dimension of discipline (prudence) pertained to the self, while the second dimension (admonition) was directed outwardly. Thus, Thānvī was a disciplinarian of the highest order in two important senses. First, he embodied asceticism and austerity (self-discipline). Second, he normatively schematized his domestic and vocational spaces and used various pedagogical techniques, including menacing ones.

Thānvī shed light on these two senses of discipline—asceticism and admonition—in his capacity as a ṣūfī theorist. He taught that the ṣūfī master ought to embody the discipline he wanted his disciples to emulate. Thānvī's embodiment of asceticism, therefore, targeted two objects of reform (*iṣlāḥ*): his personal tendencies and the bodies of his disciples. His admonition, however, was directed toward his disciples and the Muslim population in colonial India. He portrayed himself as a methodical individual and conveyed to others his strong dislike for chaos and confusion. He inhabited both conventional and idiosyncratic norms of social interaction and everyday behavior. He taught these norms or rules (*qawā'id*) to initiates and acquaintances in his ṣūfī lodge even before he communicated to them basic religious teachings or ṣūfī instruction.⁴⁹

Thānvī noted that past ṣūfīs had adopted other strategies for reforming their disciples' structures of interiority. Some of these strategies included physical tribulations and punishments that stretched bodily capacity. Thānvī realized that the age of corporal punishment had waned, and he must turn to other forms of discipline. In this regard, he preferred the strategy of “forbidding and prohibiting” (*rok-tok*). In order to understand an

⁴⁹ As Thānvī said, “There are particular rules for everything in this space [his ṣūfī lodge]. Nothing gets achieved without following the rules, and no teaching can be imparted without rules. This is why I first instruct people in rules of etiquette and then impart to them other teachings” (Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 9:14).

apt usage of this Urdu phrase, imagine a rude drillmaster who rides high on the nerves of his recruits and misses no chance to scold them. “Forbidding and prohibiting” was a verbal form of discipline, and Thānvī explained his reasons for preferring verbal abuse to physical violence. According to Thānvī, earlier ṣūfīs did not have to resort to verbal abuse. The self that medieval ṣūfīs were trying to reform was docile and sound. Medieval ṣūfīs employed harsh bodily disciplinary measures to reform some wayward disciples. The modern self, on the other hand, had grown coltish and indisciplinable by bodily rituals alone. The ego of the modern subject needed to *hear* its debasement. Thānvī articulated this point in the following way: “In the olden times ṣūfīs did not need these ways of reforming the self. This need has arisen in contemporary times. Human dispositions used to be sound (*salāmat*) in past epochs. These days, however, egos have become frivolous and prone to evil (*sharārat*). I have therefore departed from earlier ṣūfīs and adopted the new strategy (*bid‘at*) of discipline in the form of forbidding and prohibiting (*rok-tok*).”⁵⁰ How did Thānvī embody *rok-tok* in the everyday life of his ṣūfī lodge?

The following example sheds light on Thānvī’s particular style of *rok-tok*. The act of shaking hands (*muṣāfaḥa*) with the ṣūfī master was seen as a source of blessings for the disciple.⁵¹ Visitors to Thānvī’s ṣūfī lodge shook hands with him on the day of their arrival. After this initial shaking of hands, he did not permit his disciples to hover around him or to make bodily contact with him. We read about Thānvī’s anger at a novice who

⁵⁰ Thānvī, *Malfūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 5:241.

⁵¹ The handclasp (*muṣāfaḥa*), along with “the bestowal of the rosary (*subḥa*), often represented an “initiativ act” in classical Ṣūfism. See Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Ṣūfism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 20. For a wonderful discussion of the symbolic significance of the handclasp in Ṣūfism, see Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 4-8.

tried to shake hands with him a second time after spending some days in the ṣūfī lodge. Thānvī rebuked the disciple quite severely. The disciple apologized, but Thānvī lectured him with a string of stern sentences: “You now utter useless expressions of apology. Do you think saying, ‘It was my mistake,’ suffices to absolve you of the pain you have caused others?”⁵² With these words of *rok-tok*, Thānvī disciplined the disciple, and continued to do so: “Pity on you! You engage in a matter of shame indeed! I am disappointed! How will you be cured if I refrain from disciplining you due to the fear of earning a bad reputation for being curt? What is the benefit of keeping my company if these small ways of yours do not change? How will you be able to conform to the crucial teachings of religion when you cannot adhere to trivial norms of etiquette?”⁵³ We encounter numerous other examples of Thānvī’s outbursts of verbal violence throughout his recorded conversations. These dramatic words shed light on how Thānvī replaced corporal violence with verbal violence in the context of his ṣūfī practice. Thānvī used violence as a vehicle into the psychic lives of his disciples.

The act of vocal admonition, Thānvī argued, inculcated in his disciples the fear and awe of their ṣūfī master. In his ideological world, social wellbeing was contingent on intimidation of authority: “Fear is the root of social wellbeing (*amān*), which is a praiseworthy objective in itself.”⁵⁴ In the same discussion, he advised his close associates: “Intimidation (*haybat*) has an effective role in maintaining order.”⁵⁵ Thānvī conceived of his verbal sternness as a strategy to counter indiscipline. When visitors addressed him abruptly, Thānvī reverted to curt speech in order to curtail the disorder

⁵² Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:198.

⁵³ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:199.

⁵⁴ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:57.

⁵⁵ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:57.

they had brought into his disciplined space. He said, “These people come to this place and speak of irrelevant things that make me uneasy. In response to them I resort to ‘forbidding and prohibiting’ (*rok-tok*), which makes uneasy the other attendants of my ṣūfī lodge.”⁵⁶

Thānvī imagined the ṣūfī lodge to be an ideal place for reforming one’s inclination and mental constitution (the *iṣlāḥ* of the *nafs*). In this regard, the ṣūfī lodge differed from the *madrasa*. As Thānvī observed, “This place does not perform the work of a *madrasa*. The objective here is self-reformation. By the grace of God, the *madrasas* of Deoband and Saharanpur adequately address the task of teaching and learning.”⁵⁷ In his strict discipline, Thānvī merely followed an established pattern pioneered by medieval ṣūfis in India and elsewhere. As Khaliq Ahmad Nizami notes, “Strict discipline was maintained in the *khānqahs* [ṣūfī lodges] and elaborate rules were laid down for the guidance of the inmates: How to talk to the Shaikh [ṣūfī master]; how to deal with visitors; how to sit in the *khānqah*; how to walk; how and when to sleep; what dress to wear...The Shaikh sternly dealt with those inmates who were found guilty of the slightest irregularity.”⁵⁸ Thānvī compared the ṣūfī lodge to the hospital, the ṣūfī master to the physician, and ṣūfī rituals to medicine. This crowded analogy enabled him to justify the use of severe measures in order to “cure” his disciples’ spiritual and affective subjectivities.⁵⁹ This type of self-reformation was only possible with passion, an affect

⁵⁶ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:182.

⁵⁷ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:138.

⁵⁸ Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, “Some Aspects of Khānqah Life in Medieval India.” *Studia Islamica* 8 (1957), 56.

⁵⁹ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:150. The same analogy occurs in Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 9:35, where Thānvī claimed that the ṣūfī shaykh’s primary responsibility was the diagnosis of the “blameworthy spiritual ailments.”

that could be sublimated in order to realize the higher ideals of devotion to and love for the divine.

The Subject of Passion

The affect of passion was an immensely important human capacity for Muslim mystics. Let me return to Daryābādī's memoir, specifically the description of his first extended stay in Thānvī's ṣūfī lodge, to illustrate how Thānvī valued passion but sought its sublimation nonetheless. In this extended stay, Daryābādī asked the ṣūfī master: "Is there a technique by which ṣūfīs can reveal what will happen to us after death? I have heard that some ṣūfī masters have the capacity to reveal the fate of their disciples."⁶⁰ Thānvī replied: "During my student days, I posed a similar question to my esteemed teacher Mawlānā Muḥammad Ya'qūb Nānōtvī. My revered teacher replied instructively, 'Seek God's forgiveness, for you are ignorant of the implications of your question. To desire knowledge of the afterlife is tantamount to giving up faith and embracing unbelief. Faith is only possible when there is uncertainty—when your heart remains hopeful for salvation but terrified of damnation'."⁶¹ In such instances, Thānvī often recalled the aphorisms of Ya'qūb Nānōtvī whose predilection and insights left a permanent mark on Thānvī's thinking. He then counselled Daryābādī: "Even if someone had the capacity to attain this type of knowledge, their claims would only be conjectural and uncertain and therefore unworthy of your trust."⁶² Daryābādī continued to think about Thānvī's reply, which finally yielded him "peace of mind" in this matter.⁶³

⁶⁰ Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 44.

⁶¹ Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 44.

⁶² Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 44.

⁶³ Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 44.

Daryābādī's question about the afterlife was steeped in traditional Muslim doctrines about the human soul. Daryābādī sought gnostic knowledge, the elite claim to know reality. Although Thānvī shared Daryābādī's metaphysical assumptions about the human soul, Thānvī's answer acknowledged the limits of human knowledge. By citing Ya'qūb Nānōtvī's instructive example, Thānvī first supplied Daryābādī a definition of faith. In his rendering, faith was not the same as knowledge. Faith was an internal movement oscillating between the affective stations of hope and fear. If one possessed empirical knowledge about the afterlife, one no longer *believed* but *knew* this creedal matter. After clarifying that faith and knowledge implied different epistemological positions, Thānvī shared with Daryābādī another teaching: gnostic experience does not necessitate belief, for it yields only probable knowledge. In turn this teaching meant that the tenets of belief were conveyed by sources of certain knowledge, which was restricted to revelation and reason alone for orthodox Muslim theologians. This succinct response disclosed features of Thānvī's thinking that would finally convince Daryābādī of the relevance and promise of the ṣūfī master's understanding of human subjectivity.

During this first extended stay in Thānvī's ṣūfī lodge, Daryābādī had the chance to observe the ṣūfī master quite closely. What he saw did not conform to the popular image painted by Thānvī's fervent followers and adversaries alike. They depicted him as a ruthless jurist-theologian who used the rod to discipline the science of mysticism. Daryābādī claimed that above everything else, Thānvī embodied civility and hospitality and had a heart full of empathy for others. Before Daryābādī returned to Lucknow, Thānvī announced that he would deliver a general sermon. In this sermon he repeatedly discussed the theme of sadness and elaborated strategies for coping with personal loss.

Before visiting Thānvī, Daryābādī had informed the ṣūfī master about the recent death of his new-born son. Thānvī's decision to lecture on sadness therefore consoled the melancholic Daryābādī, who took the ṣūfī master's counsels about sadness as a sign of his deep empathy for others. Thānvī's self-discipline, systematic thinking, and compassion left a deep imprint on Daryābādī's personality. He summed up his sense of excitement about this newfound relationship in the following manner: "I came back to Lucknow with an intoxicated heart. My personality was decorated with happiness and joy. It felt as if I had unearthed a great treasure. Christopher Columbus had discovered America!"⁶⁴

Daryābādī's further correspondence with Thānvī gradually introduced him to other aspects of the ṣūfī master's teaching. He soon began soliciting Thānvī's advice on matters of personal religiosity and experience. A case in point was his 1929 letter to Thānvī after returning from Arabia where he had performed the Ḥajj pilgrimage.⁶⁵ He wrote, "I undertook the pilgrimage with many shortcomings. Please pray to God for me, so that my flawed and superficial performance of this monumental ritual is accepted in the divine presence."⁶⁶ Thānvī's reply shed light on several key ṣūfī concepts. He wrote, "Your flaws made this pilgrimage an act of love. Had it been performed without any shortcomings, it would have been an act of reason."⁶⁷ The lover (*‘āshiq*) offers his ritual acts to God as tokens of love. With a burning heart, the lover is always anxious as to

⁶⁴ Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 44.

⁶⁵ On Daryābādī's pilgrimage, see the following wonderful essay: Hodaya Ziad, "The Return of Gog: Politics and Pan-Islamism in the Hajj Travelogue of 'Abd al-Majid Daryabadi" In *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print*, eds. James L. Gelvin and Nile Green (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 2014): 227-248.

⁶⁶ Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 58.

⁶⁷ Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 59.

whether God will accept or reject the meek expressions of his devotion. The rational person (*'āqil*), on the other hand, does not harbor salvific anxiety, since he has fulfilled the religious obligation in a safe and calculated way. By naming Daryābādī an *'āshiq*, Thānvī removed his friend's negative assessment of his ritual performance. Thānvī consoled him further: "The *'āshiq* is characterized by feelings of disappointment (*ma'yūsī*), remorse (*hasrat*), misfortune (*nā-murādī*), and failure (*nā-kāmī*). The *'āshiq* is never relieved of worry nor does he attain absolute peace of mind."⁶⁸ With this answer, Thānvī alluded to the importance of divine love in the religious life of a Muslim. Love and intense passion were central concepts in Thānvī's understanding of human subjectivity. Thānvī took passion to be an important but volatile affect that had to be disciplined by the normative canons of reason and revelation.

In Thānvī's teaching, intense love or passion (*'ishq*) constituted the essence of the human being.⁶⁹ In numerous places in his textual corpus, Thānvī claimed that *'ishq* constituted the human being's distinguishing trait. He said, for example, "If you ponder genuinely you will understand that *'ishq* is the human being's true distinguishing quality...God the Most High has endowed the human being abundantly with the physical capacity for passion. Other living beings do not have these capacities to the same degree."⁷⁰ In his musings on love, Thānvī departed from the classical philosophical formulation according to which the human being was "the rational animal" (*ḥaywān*

⁶⁸ Daryābādī, *Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 59.

⁶⁹ In his masterly work, *Divine Love*, William C. Chittick observes that for a long time he was in agreement with the monumental claim of Franz Rosenthal that the concept of "knowledge" was "the very heart of the Qur'ānic message." However, Chittick revised this position, and now believes that the concept of love "does a better job of conveying the nature of the quest for God that lies at the tradition's heart" (*Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013], xi).

⁷⁰ Thānvī, *Ashraf al-tafāsīr*, 3:333-4.

nāṭiq). Thānvī suggested that God had endowed all animals with some intellectual capacity. Passion or intense love, however, was distinctly a human feeling. Thānvī therefore replaced the phrase, *the rational animal*, with the phrase, *the passionate animal* (*ḥaywān ‘āshiq*).⁷¹

Thānvī addressed the question of intelligence in non-human animals throughout his sermons and recorded conversations. In a discussion among fellow scholars in August 1932, he explained that classical and medieval philosophers, theologians, and jurists had misjudged the nature of intelligence and intellect. According to him, “It is possible that beasts (*bahā’im*) have intellectual capacity (*‘aql*). However, their intelligence does not reach the level required for necessitating moral responsibility (*taklīf*).”⁷² Here, Thānvī invoked the theoretical framework of Ḥanafī legalism. For Ḥanafī legal jurists, the distinguishing feature of the human being was one’s capacity to reason (*‘aql*), which was actualized only when one attained majority. Muslim rational adults alone, argued the jurists, were responsible (*mukallaf*) for observing the moral law. Children were not held responsible precisely because they lacked *‘aql* to an adequate degree. Thānvī analogized animals to children: both types of beings inhabited forms of intelligence imperceptible to the legal gaze. As Thānvī explained, “Observe how children have a good deal of intelligence, but not the sort of intellectual capacity that could legitimate the obligation to fulfill legal injunctions. Likewise, it is absolutely fine to claim that animals, too, could have a form of intelligence inferior to what is required for necessitating legal responsibility.”⁷³ Thānvī importantly accepted the notion of variegated intelligence and

⁷¹ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 4:222.

⁷² Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:18.

⁷³ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:18-19.

intellectual capacity. His reason for conceding intelligence to animals was based on empirical evidence: “There are many instances and observations that compel us to accept the presence of *‘aql* in animals, for some of their behavior can only be explained by intellectual capacity and not sense-perception (*hiss*).”⁷⁴ In this way, Thānvī departed from the classical tradition and its imprint on Muslim moral and legal discourses. What might be the larger implications of these claims?

Thānvī’s claims about the variegated distribution of intellectual capacity in the animal world do not make him a post-humanist. It is true that he was attentive to the rights of animals in Muslim moral teachings. In fact, in 1917 he authored a brief treatise on animal rights, using scores of prophetic traditions (*aḥādīth*) to elaborate the moral injunction for compassion toward animals.⁷⁵ However, his claim about *the passionate animal* aimed to intervene in a discourse altogether alien to post-humanism. By claiming that intellectual capacity did not define human essence, Thānvī revised the philosophical assumption undergirding much of the Muslim theological and legal tradition. Most Muslim theologians and legal theorists embraced and deployed the reason-based definition of human essence. This philosophical position, however, conflicted with how some major ṣūfī theorists understood human reality.

Thānvī turned to the theories expounded by Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, Shāh Walī Allāh, and the latter’s grandson Shāh Ismā‘īl Shahīd (d. 1831). According to these ṣūfī theorists, reason and passion characterized two distinct approaches to God. Reason was the mark of prophethood (*nubuwwa*) and passion was the hallmark of sainthood (*walāya*).

⁷⁴ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:19.

⁷⁵ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Irshād al-hā‘im fī ḥuqūq al-bahā‘im* (Delhi: Kutub Khāna Ashrafiyya, 1925).

We know that Thānvī was aware of the collected discourses of the early nineteenth-century ṣūfī reformer Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd (d. 1831). In *Ṣirāṭ-i mustaqīm* (*The Straight Path*), the latter's chief disciple and a scholar-cum-ṣūfī in his own right Shāh Ismā'īl Shahīd organized his ṣūfī master's discourses according to the themes of *nubuwwa* and *walāya*.⁷⁶ Thānvī cited approvingly Shāh Ismā'īl Shahīd's *Ṣirāṭ-i mustaqīm* in his analytical writings on ṣūfism. According to the latter, every human being had the capacity to become a saint (*walī*)—sainthood or *walāya* was therefore universal—but not everyone could become a prophet (*nabī*), for *nubuwwa* was the exclusive privilege given to the chosen few. Shāh Ismā'īl Shahīd argued that *ishq* characterized *walāya*, while intellectual capacity or *'aql* characterized *nubuwwa*. This formulation demanded a conceptual revamping of Muslim theology and jurisprudence, two discourses that assumed the primacy of *'aql* for defining human essence. However, Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd and Shāh Ismā'īl Shahīd left unattended this analytical demand, most likely because decentering the reason-based definition of human essence would have far-reaching implications for the conceptual structures of Muslim theology and legalism.

Thānvī's claims about animal intelligence contributed to the discourse on *walāya* and *nubuwwa*. He claimed that passion and not reason defined humanity, for non-human animals possessed minimal reason (even though maximal reason belonged to the prophets). In other words, minimal reason was too universal to constitute the distinguishing trait of the human being. This argument implied that while all human beings *felt* the truth, only a select few *understood* the truth. The ordinary Muslim was obligated not to perfectly *understand* the divine presence, but to adequately *feel* divine

⁷⁶ Shāh Ismā'īl Shahīd, *Ṣirāṭ-i mustaqīm* (Karachi: Muḥammad Sa'īd and Sons, n.d.).

presence. By acknowledging the inferior intellectual capacity of non-human animals, Thānvī prepared the grounds for articulating the universality of *walāya*.⁷⁷ Perfect reason, in his ṣūfī imagination, belonged only to the prophets and those sound minds that inhabited the prophetic relation (*nisbat-i nubuwwat*). This was the highest form of *‘aql*, available only to those whose power of understanding grasped the reality of things. The *‘aql* that characterized most humanity, however, was ordinary intelligence that non-human animals had to a lower degree than humans. In effect, Thānvī’s claims democratized affect, while they further narrowed the domain of reason. Thānvī took this ṣūfī teaching to its logical conclusions, even though it departed from the assumptions of the theological and the legal tradition. This was yet another contradiction of his colonial milieu, which was ripe for sustaining the multiple impulses of ṣūfism and legalism. Thānvī’s democratization of *walāya*, which meant grounding human essence in *‘ishq*, also necessitated the need for a rational ṣūfī master who could help his disciples inhabit the world of rational love, as opposed to sensual passion.

Degrees of Intensity: ‘ishq and maḥabba

Thānvī’s take on *‘ishq* resonated with myriad past intellectual traditions. His discussions of love blended Muslim pietistic ideas with classical and medieval mystical theories, especially as expounded by the ṣūfī masters of his spiritual fellowship, the Chishtiyya-Ṣābiriyya. The Neo-Platonic conception of love entered Thānvī’s discourse through these ṣūfī traditions.⁷⁸ Thānvī repeatedly attributed love to the Chishtīs and

⁷⁷ Although Thānvī differentiated between *walāya ‘āmma* (all-inclusive sainthood) and *walāya khāṣṣa* (exclusive sainthood). All Muslims could participate in the former category, while the latter category characterized saintly Muslims. See Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 29:28.

⁷⁸ Thānvī’s ideas on love can be productively compared to post-Augustinian Christian theology, a project that I hope to undertake in my future research on Thānvī.

reason and *sharīʿa*-mindedness to the Naqshbandīs. At other places, he characterized Naqshbandīs as experts of knowledge and Chishtīs as experts of practice.⁷⁹ Like his ṣūfī predecessors, Thānvī took God to be the primary object of intense passion and love, though we also find mention of other objects of love, including the Prophet Muḥammad, one’s teachers and ṣūfī master, friends, and relatives.

Thānvī taught that love for God compelled one to belief. In his diction, “I believe in God” and “I love God” were equivalent phrases: “Belief involves intense passion (*‘ishq*). When you say, ‘we believe’ (*āmannā*), you in fact state, ‘we adore and love’ (*‘ashiqnā*).”⁸⁰ The essence of belief was affirming something to be true in one’s heart. One affirmed what one loved because the object of love was the source of one’s survival and happiness. The objects of the world—people, things, and relations—could not guarantee eternal survival and happiness. God alone made that promise, and therefore the piety-minded took God to be the primary object of their love and belief. This desire for God was in fact a form of loving oneself into eternity.⁸¹

Thānvī was not always clear regarding the priority of love within the inner life of the believer. An analogy he proffered emphasized the primacy of belief, claiming that belief necessitated love: “When you take a woman to be your wife by saying, ‘I accept,’ during the marriage ceremony, you in fact agree to provide for her needs.”⁸² In this analogy, the performative utterance—“I accept”—necessitated a set of marital

⁷⁹ This distinction between the *‘ilm* of the Naqshbandīs and the *‘amal* of the Chishtīs was one of intensity. In other words, Thānvī taught that while figures associated with both ṣūfī orders endorsed *‘ilm* and *‘amal*, they differed with respect to their foci. See Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 9:28.

⁸⁰ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:43-44.

⁸¹ This understanding of love does not differ from the Augustinian conception of *appetitus*, *caritas*, and *cupiditas*. For a philosophically rigorous exposition of the Augustinian position, see Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, eds. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁸² Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:44.

responsibilities. Likewise, argued Thānvī, was the case with professing belief, which signified that one was ready to love God. He explained that one could not love God except by obedience to God’s commandments.⁸³ A person’s embodiment of piety was proof of her or his love for God. In this iteration, Thānvī grounded love in belief and ritual practice, an analytical move that was symptomatic of his simultaneous inhabitation of the multiple intellectual currents of ṣūfism and sacred law.

Ṣūfī theorists have debated the related concepts of “passion” (*‘ishq*) and “love” (*maḥabba*). Some ṣūfis preferred using the word, *maḥabba*, over *‘ishq*.⁸⁴ The latter is not from Qur’ānic vocabulary and resonated with the Platonic notion of *eros*.⁸⁵ Thānvī bridged the gap between these two valences of love by recourse to the following Qur’ānic verse: “The believers are intense in their love for God” (Qur’ān, 2:165). He explained that *‘ishq* was another expression for intense love.⁸⁶ “This form of love,” he said, “annihilates from one’s heart everything other than the beloved.”⁸⁷ At times, Thānvī used *‘ishq* and *maḥabba* synonymously, especially when referring to the effects they produced in human subjectivity. Love was extraordinary. Difficult things became easy in love. Without love, however, the easy tasks of everyday life appeared arduous. Thānvī

⁸³ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:44

⁸⁴ A case in point is Abu’l-Qasim ‘Abd al-Karīm b. Hawazin al-Qushayrī’s *Al-Risalat fī ‘ilm al-tasawwuf*. Qushayrī attributed the following saying to his teacher, Abu ‘Ali al-Hasan al-Daqqad (d. ca. 1015): “*‘ishq* trespasses the limits of *maḥabba*” (*Al-Risalat al-Qushayriyya fī ‘ilm al-tasawwuf*, 321).

⁸⁵ As Carl W. Ernst explains, “The key term here was *‘ishq* or passionate love, on non-Qur’ānic origin and similar in connotation to the Greek *eros*. Scriptural purists, we are told, were unhappy with this disturbing term and preferred the milder word *maḥabba* or compassionate love. This word had the advantage of Qur’ānic origin and relatively milder associations than with *‘ishq*” (Carl W. Ernst, “Rūzbihān Baqlī on Love as ‘Essential Desire’.” In *God is Beautiful and He Loves Beauty: Festschrift in Honour of Annemarie Schimmel, presented by students, friends, and colleagues on April 7, 1992*, eds. Alma Giese and J. Christoph Bürgel [Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 1994], 182).

⁸⁶ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:122. ‘Abd al-Bārī Nadvī made the same point in his exposition of Thānvī’s ṣūfī teaching on love. See Nadvī, *Tajdīd-i taṣawwuf wa sulūk*, 88.

⁸⁷ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:122.

conveyed a similar insight about love: “Even easy and flexible tasks appear as arduous and difficult to those who lack *maḥabba* and ‘*ishq*.”⁸⁸ In this sentence, Thānvī used ‘*ishq* and *maḥabba* interchangeably in order to throw light on how love affects human personality. Thānvī articulated these ideas about love in order to identify for his disciples the ordinary power of love.

How does one embody love and excel in passion? Thānvī provided numerous answers to this question. The most important method for inculcating love, argued Thānvī, was keeping the company of those who have already embodied love (*ahl-i maḥabbat*). He said, “A few days in the company of ‘the people of love’ will do the trick.”⁸⁹ At other places in his oeuvre, Thānvī provided a more theoretical account of the causes of love. He identified the following four sources of love: physical beauty (*jamāl*), moral excellence (*kamāl*), beneficence (*nawāl*), and companionship (*ittiṣāl*).⁹⁰ According to this alliterative formulation, we enter the kingdom of love through four gates of beauty: physical, spiritual, relational, and spatial. Thānvī thus named four modes of signification that induced psychic attachment: the visual sign (*jamāl*), the moral sign (*kamāl*), the ego-affirming sign (*nawāl*), and the sign of shared history and space (*ittiṣāl*).

In Thānvī’s vocabulary, the concept of “intense passion” (‘*ishq*) was also related to loyalty (*i’tiqād*). Loyalty, he argued, was contingent. Our loyalties change over time depending on our interests and pursuits. He therefore understood loyalty as a relation of the world; it had no permanence, even if it had become seasoned to appear as constant. In contradistinction to loyalty, he explained that love was a permanent instinctual feeling:

⁸⁸ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:99.

⁸⁹ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:99.

⁹⁰ Thānvī, *Khutbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 19:335-36. Here he listed the first three (visual sign, moral sign, and ego-affirming sign), while the fourth is listed elsewhere.

“You are loyal to someone as long as the loyalty makes sense. Love, however, does not wane in the face of changing circumstances.”⁹¹ This saying indicates that he took love to be a central emotional faculty. While the objects of love change, love itself endures because it is one of our innate qualities.

Thānvī divided love into rational (*‘aqliyya*) and affective (*ṭab‘iyya*).⁹² Thānvī’s consistent paradoxical use of the reason-affect binary in his discussions of love deserves some explanation. What is the meaning of attributing reason to an emotion, as in “rational love”? Thānvī explained these two types of love by recourse to a patriarchal analogy: rational and emotional forms of love were similar to paternal and maternal forms of affection, respectively. Maternal love, explained Thānvī, consisted of an intense feeling (*kayfiyat*) of attachment that sometimes overlooked the child’s broader interests (*maṣlaḥa*). Paternal love, however, prioritized the child’s welfare over the child’s instant gratification.⁹³ According to this analogy, maternal love alone failed to guarantee the child’s eventual survival and happiness. In order to achieve these goals, the father figure had to mediate the distribution of emotion to the child.

Disciplined love—an emotion mediated by reason—furnished the moral subject with the intellectual justifications for belief and righteous action. Emotional love could intensify belief and external devotion, but it was not strong enough to motivate one to faith and embodiment.⁹⁴ In the age of reason, it was necessary to believe and obey God out of rational conviction and not due to emotional sways. The rational lover, argued

⁹¹ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 9:30.

⁹² Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:24.

⁹³ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 9:61.

⁹⁴ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:24.

Thānvī, despised with her heart all internal or external behavior unapproved by the beloved.⁹⁵

By dividing love into rational and affective, Thānvī was able to sublimate sensual love onto divine love. The moral subject could only latch onto God and piety by means of affective investment. However, affect writ large was too volatile. It had to undergo a careful scrutiny in the court of reason. This rational disciplining of love separated sensual love from divine love. In this respect, Thānvī upheld the following age-old distinctions from the Greek, Latin, and Arabo-Persian contemplative traditions: *eros* and *agape*, *cupiditas* and *caritas*, and *‘ishq ḥaqīqī* and *‘ishq majāzī*, respectively. In all of these variations, love of objects external to oneself was a mere hindrance in the way of eternal subsistence. True love yielded eternal happiness, and therefore required latching onto an eternal object. All three traditions—Greek philosophy, Christian theology, and Arabo-Persian mysticism—emphasized finding an object of love that transcended the immanent scenes of human existence. For Plotinus, Christian theologians, and Muslim mystics, God fit the description of this eternal object of love. Thānvī intensified this differentiation of love, and deployed it to discipline the subjectivities of his disciples in colonial India.

Conclusion

Within the colonial Indian context, Thānvī was not unique in deploying the binary of rational love and affective love. Shāh Ismā‘īl Shahīd had mobilized the same distinction. A similar inner differentiation of love appeared in the poetry of Thānvī’s ṣūfī master, Hājī Imdād Allāh (d. 1898).⁹⁶ Taken together, this discourse about the regulation

⁹⁵ Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:122.

⁹⁶ This is evident in the collection of sayings titled *Ṣirāt-i mustaqīm*. See Shāh Ismā‘īl Shahīd, *Ṣirāt-i mustaqīm*, 15-19. Thānvī addressed this in his book, *Al-Takashshuf*. See also, Nadvī, *Tajdīd-i*

of passion served several specific social and political purposes. It enabled orthodox theologians such as Thānvī to distance themselves from the colonial attribution of emotion to colonized natives. Thānvī devised and staged a disciplined (and rational) Muslim moral subjectivity in order to counter this stereotype. The idea of “rational love” was convenient for him in order to produce a counter-image of the ideal Muslim. This discourse also enabled Thānvī to contain and order the volatile currents of personal and communal affective tendencies, and thereby exercise a form of pastoral power.

The versatility of Thānvī’s alternative Muslim subject appealed to recovering modernists such as Daryābādī. Other modernists also established correspondence with Thānvī. Muslim intellectuals, such as the historian Sayyid Sulāymān Nadvī, turned to Thānvī for spiritual guidance. Apart from his correspondence with these elite intellectuals, Thānvī also left behind significant collections of correspondence with ordinary Muslims.⁹⁷ This epistolary archive indicates that ṣūfī scholars such as Thānvī became one-man institutions in late colonial India in order to counsel Muslims, helping them inhabit an alternative Enlightenment. Thānvī’s correspondence illustrates how reclusive saints regulated social life, how they enhanced their ṣūfī practice by means of print technology, and how they expanded the scope of their authority with the help of the colonial postal service. Thānvī’s epistolary archive also documented rare letters in which disciples revealed their homoerotic tendencies. Thānvī applied the force of his tradition,

taṣawwuf wa sulūk, 89-90. In his *Masnavī tuḥfat al-‘ushshāq*, Hājī Imdād Allāh included a pome by the title, “Pertaining to the Distinction between True Love and Sensual Love, and the Condemnation of Sensual Love.” In the third couplet of this poem, he claimed that true love was attained by the report of the heart, the seat of conscience. See Hājī Imdād Allāh, *Kulliyāt-i Imdādiyya* (Karachi: Dār al-Ishā‘at, n.d.), 135.

⁹⁷ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-Sālik*. 3 vols. (Karachi: Dār al-Ishā‘at, n.d.). Other epistolary collections include Ḥasan ‘Abbās, ed. *Ashraf al-maktūbāt* (Karachi: Idārat al-Qur’ān wal-‘Ulum al-Islāmiyya, 2000); Muḥammad Mushtāq Sattī, ed. *Makātīb-i Ḥakīm al-Ummat ba-nām Ḥazrat Mawlānā Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘ Ṣāhib* (Karachi: Idārat al-Ma‘ārif, 1996).

and binaries such as *‘ishq* and *maḥabba*, to sublimate passion. The next chapter takes desire and sublimation as its main foci.

Chapter 4. The Scene of Sublimation: Sensuality and Divinity

The last chapter showed how Daryābādī was an exceptional reader of Thānvī: at once considerate, creative, and critical. Most of Thānvī's disciples, however, unquestioningly accepted their mentor's guidance and advice. The textual evidence indicates that most disciples cultivated the capacity for submission, as if the pleasure of self-effacement was greater than the pleasure of self-independence. They fostered a culture of reverence around the ṣūfī master, an aura that imbued the person of Thānvī with the charisma needed for enjoying pastoral power. Thānvī's ultra-loyal followers included lay and scholarly disciples alike. Volumes of correspondence (*maktūbāt*) documented intense circuits of attachment and intimacy between Thānvī and his disciples. This epistolary archive recorded the various forms of desire operative in this orthodox world: Thānvī's loving affection for his disciples; their desire for his attention and approval; constant craving for the divine; extra-marital heterosexual desire; homoerotic desire for youths; among other species of fantasy.¹

I excavate the epistolary sites where these brands of desire found representation and enunciation. This excavation reveals that the discursive content of Muslim orthodoxy penetrated the psychosexual lives of Thānvī and his disciples. They readily submitted to the mandates of the moral law, which they believed guaranteed eventual, everlasting pleasure. What does it mean to say that Thānvī and his disciples respected the same moral law that subjugated their passion and desire to an economy of prohibitions?

¹ This epistolary archive also yields the occasion to investigate what constituted the personal and the private within orthodox establishments, especially given that disciples often reported to the ṣūfī master what many readers would consider "private" thoughts. Thānvī then *published* selected "private" conversations, albeit after rendering these letters anonymous, in *Al-Imdad*, the journal-like publication of his ṣūfī lodge.

It is important to answer this question, especially when Freud and Foucault tell us that pleasure consists of transgression. In the wake of psychoanalysis, it is often argued that the moral law identifies desire not only in its injunctions of licit sexual relations, but also in its prohibitions of illicit sexual acts. In this way, the moral law generates the very desire it seeks to censure. The desire for the illicit is a desire to transgress the moral law, regardless of the content of the transgression. However, this theory does not explain pleasure in the context of Muslim orthodoxy. Transgressive desire remained incredibly weak in Thānvī's epistolary archive, for it was powerfully tamed and sublimated. In the world of Muslim orthodoxy, extended stays of desire occurred in scenes of sublimation, where the pleasure of submission reigned supreme. Thus, in Thānvī's archive transgression of the moral law did not guarantee pleasure, indicating the success of traditionalist forms of sublimation. Submission instead of subversion yielded pleasure to the orthodox Muslim subject. Recall Thānvī's biographical details, especially his respect for authority and submission to established orthodox teachings.

The sublimation of erotic desire onto a higher object of desire, namely God, was an ideal ṣūfī "technology of the self."² Sublimation kept alive the flame of desire but used its light to illuminate a relationship that transcended sensuality. Ṣūfīs taught this technology to their disciples by recourse to countless anecdotes and lyrics from the books of ṣūfī prose and poetry. Let me furnish an example from Thānvī's sermons.

² Foucault's distinguishing of "technology of the self" from "theology of the soul" is helpful in this context. For Foucault, "technologies of the self...permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow and trans. Robert Hurley et al. [New York: The New Press, 1994], 225).

Speaking to an audience of around 50 residents of his ṣūfī lodge in October 1930, Thānvī cited an anecdote from the famed Egyptian ṣūfī and theologian Ibn ‘Aṭā Allāh al-Sakandarī (d. 1309). The didactic anecdote was about a man from medieval Islamdom receiving corporal punishment for pursuing “sensual love” (*‘ishq-i majāzī*): “This lover was punished with 100 lashes. The authorities lashed him 99 times and he remained silent at each thrashing. But he shrieked at the final blow.”³ The anecdote created a mystery: why did the lover only shriek at the final blow? Thānvī explained that this lover’s beloved was among the spectators during the first 99 lashes. The lover was so absorbed in sacrificing his body at the altar of passion that he forgot the physical pain caused by these scores of lashes. The lover took pleasure in knowing that the beloved was gazing at his bodily sacrifice. When the beloved left the scene of punishment, however, the lover came back to his bodily sensations and shrieked from the pain of the final blow. Thānvī used this anecdote’s imagery of pleasure and pain and the example of the sensual lover to underscore something about divine love: “This is the story of a lover whose beloved eventually deserted him. Your Beloved, however, is always by your side. The gaze of your Beloved is fixed upon you. Your Beloved ‘neither falls into slumber nor retires to sleep’ [Qur’ān 2:255]. So take pleasure in the tormenting talk of those who scold you for being in love with God.”⁴ This was vintage sublimation. It metaphorized the imagery of sensuality and retained the full drama of this-worldly love for rhetorical purposes. It acknowledged an intense human capacity—love, desire, passion, longing—that was powerful enough to transcend worldly objects and latch onto pure objectivity.

³ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 29:39.

⁴ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 29:39.

My focus on desire and sublimation serves to illustrate that orthodoxy was successful and enduring because it was able to inscribe the moral law on the psyches of its adherents. Ideas and rituals thrive in social landscapes when people find meaning, but also pleasure, in embodying them in everyday lives. Behind every thriving social institution are networks of psychic investments and emotional attachments, dramas of eros and agape. I study these scenes of embodiment—themes such as desire and sublimation—because in bodies and pleasures are the blueprints for personal motivations and the traces of political power.

Dealing with Desire: Methodological Considerations

Thānvī dealt with various forms of desire in careful and calculated ways. He understood that desire was absolutely essential for human social wellbeing and spiritual journeys. In this regard, Thānvī mobilized the legal distinction between intended and unintended acts—which went back to the biblical distinction in *Leviticus* between manslaughter and murder—in order to schematize the limits of human responsibility. Classical Muslim jurists repurposed the above distinction in order to determine the punishment for intended murder and unintended manslaughter. Later Muslim jurists and theologians extended the distinction between intended acts and un-intended inclinations and acts to adjudicate human behavior, including erotic inclinations and sexual acts. Muslim ethicists took seriously the following saying attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad: “For His love of me, God has indeed pardoned my followers in matters of

mistake, forgetfulness, and coercion.”⁵ According to this teaching, human responsibility was proportionate to human freedom.

Thānvī repurposed these classical teachings in the context of regulating and sublimating the erotic desires, including homoerotic inclinations, of his ṣūfī disciples in colonial South Asia. Taking up Thānvī’s marginal but meaningful references to licit and illicit intimacy highlights some of the translational anxieties and discursive fault lines between Islamic studies and queer theory. In this chapter, I use Thānvī’s orthodox textual archives in order to make three methodological interventions at this disciplinary intersection.

First, using the case study of an orthodox theologian displaces the scholarly obsession with identifying the queer or the homosexual in subcultural social and subversive textual spaces. The desire for a subversive subject penetrates the psychoanalytical veins of queer theory as well as the deployments of queer theory within postcolonial studies.⁶ In its dominant strands, queer theory seeks to represent those

⁵ This *ḥadīth* is recorded in *Sunan Ibn Mājah* and Bayhaqī’s *Al-Sunan al-kubrā*.

⁶ The following example from Leo Bersani’s *Homos* suffices to illustrate this point: “The desirable social transgressiveness of gayness—its aptitude for contesting oppressive structures—depends not on denying a gay identity, but rather on exploring the links between a specific sexuality, psychic mobility, and a potentially radical politics” (Leo Bersani, *Homos* [Cambridge, MASS.: Harvard University Press, 1995], 56). Although this statement of Bersani supports the claim that psychoanalytical queer theory has embraced a subversive subject, it needs to be properly situated within Bersani’s argument in *Homos*. Through this statement, Bersani continues his critique of those queer theorists who assume that queerness necessarily entails radical politics. In his 1987 seminal essay, “Is the Rectum a Grave?” Bersani makes a similar statement with reference to male homosexuality: “To want sex with another man is not exactly a credential for political radicalism” (*October*, vol. 43 [1987], 205). One of Bersani’s aims in *Homos* is to unveil the dangers of the poststructuralist queer theoretical critique of identity (in the works of theorists such as Butler and Sedgwick). For him, identity is not imbued with the sort of conceptual narrowness such queer theorists had attached to it. Instead of viewing difference as the other of identity, Bersani proposes that we view difference as a “nonthreatening supplement to sameness” (*Homos*, 7). In other words, queer radical politics risk being dangerously complicit with homophobic differences when it relies on a theoretical disavowal of the specificity of *homo* identities (see Bersani, *Homos*, 42). Within postcolonial studies, scholars deploying queer theory have not mobilized the queer potentials of non-subversive spaces and practices. For instance, in *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, Gayatri Gopinath uses queer to

bodies, pleasures, and politics that are stridently anti-heteronormative. My analysis of Thānvī, however, does not excavate queer theory's celebrated subject of subversive politics and ethics, nor does it present a Muslim instance of "the transgressiveness of gayness." Instead, the following reading uses Thānvī's writings to analyze how queer desire emerged within the heteronormativity of orthodox Islam. In Thānvī's archive, queer desire assumed the structural position of psychic excess in the otherwise homosocial-yet-homophobic aura of his orthodox discourse.⁷

Second, the focus on a South Asian theologian disrupts the Arabo-Persianite bias and the geopolitical conflation of the Islamicate and the Middle East explicit in much contemporary commentary, including the essays collected in the 2008 edited volume, *Islamicate Sexualities*.⁸ This conflation ignores the diverse dynamics of vast Islamicate cultures and discursive traditions of Asia and Africa beyond the Middle East. Despite the important overlap between the Islamicate and the Middle Eastern, we have to use these terms with much caution, as they signify different social realities, geographic demarcations, and discursive configurations. My case study retrieves and analyzes desire

mean "a range of dissident and non-heteronormative practices and desires that may very well be incommensurate with the identity categories of 'gay' and 'lesbian'" (Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*, 11).

⁷ Here I am drawing from Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 132-150. In the chapter titled, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification," Butler pursues a provocative discussion of the ways in which a Freudian psychoanalytical framework enables us to view heterosexuality as an effect of the disavowal of homosexual attachments. Thus, the excess or remainder that is queer desire is the lost object mourned by the ego. Moreover, that which is seemingly outside of heterosexual gender formation (in this case the excess of repressed homosexual attachment) continues to be determinative of the formation itself. Butler acknowledges that such a reading could be seen as "a hyperbolic theory, a logic in drag...which overstates the case," but then also asserts that such a reading "overstates it for a reason," which in this case is related to the political necessity of claiming homosexuality at the level of a sociological identity (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 149).

⁸ Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi, eds. *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire* (Cambridge, MASS.: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2008). Joseph Massad also notes the conflation between the Middle Eastern and the Islamicate in the above volume. See Joseph Massad, *Islam in Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 215.

and sublimation in an Islamicate context that has been at the margins of the burgeoning literature on queer theory and Islamicate sexualities.⁹

Third, to identify queer desire as a site of excess within the formulations of traditionalist Muslim theology also complicates the *straight* representations of such theology in Islamic studies. Scholars who have written on South Asian Muslim theologians in the colonial period have amassed a wealth of information about the lives of their subjects. Yet this scholarship attends mostly to the intellectual production and socio-political involvement of colonial Muslim theologians. Their sexual desires and practices have not figured into their scholarly representation. Precluded from scholarship have also been the discussions of traditional norms governing sexual practices, which Muslim theologians, ethicists, and jurists treat with extensive detail in their writings and social practices. Much of this material belongs to the genre of Islamic legal ethics (*fiqh*), a field of knowledge production that features prominently in the archives of South Asian Muslim theologians. In all likelihood, Islamic studies scholars and historians of Indo-Muslim culture have avoided discussing matters of sexuality in the lives of their subjects because materials pertaining to sexuality are *seemingly* absent in their archives. At the same time, the *supposed* absence of something in the archives should be reason enough to start an inquiry.

⁹ Scott Kugle has pioneered both the critical study of South Asian Islamicate sexualities and constructive theological thinking about queer Muslim lives. What I offer here intervenes specifically at the intersections of queer theory as a form of disciplinary inquiry and the study of South Asian Muslim traditionalism. While Kugle's work does not address sexuality in the archives of the traditionalists, it has been enabling for my own thinking about the historiography of Islamicate South Asia vis-à-vis sexuality studies. See Scott Kugle, "Sultan Mahmud's Makeover: Colonial Homophobia and Persian-Urdu Poetics," in *Queering India: Same-sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society*, ed. Ruth Vanita (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 30-46. See also the fourth chapter of *Sufis' and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

The “stuff” of sexuality is not entirely missing from the archives of South Asian Muslim orthodoxy. Instead, the trace of the sexual appears and disappears like a specter, there and not-there, confirming and troubling its subjugations to any straightforward representation.¹⁰ Related to the difficulty of using modern, Western labels to talk about Islamicate species of desire, is the question of what counts as “sexual” or “erotic.” What do we make of reports about same-sex attachments—encoded in scripts of reverence (*adab*) and loyalty (*i‘tiqād*)—in the textual universe of traditionalist Islam? For example, ‘Azīz al-Ḥasan Ghawrī’s love for Thānvī was renowned among the latter’s fellowship. As Thānvī’s philosopher disciple ‘Abd al-Bārī Nadvī put it:

I can safely analogize Khwāja Sāhib [Ghawrī] and Mawlānā Thānvī to Amīr Khusrau and Sultān Jī [the ṣūfī Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā]. Khwāja Sāhib was not only Mawlānā Thānvī’s disciple and lover, but also his beloved...I remember once we were all sitting with Mawlānā Thānvī and Khwāja Sāhib journeyed away into trance. He started reading his poetry out loud. For a long time Mawlānā Thānvī listened attentively and admiringly. When Khwāja Sāhib dove deeper into ecstasy, Mawlānā Thānvī remarked with affection, “You have given us enough for today.”¹¹

This form of intimacy bordered on eros, but stopped short of becoming erotic. It was a heartfelt attachment between two persons that did not necessarily materialize into haptic communion. It was incomparable to heterosexual coupledness or copulation. In this way, this form of intimacy can be called a queer desire, an ineffable pursuit of passion.

In Muslim orthodoxy, queer desire appeared in short supply, lasting long enough only to be sublimated to discipline the traditionalist Muslim subject. Such spectral

¹⁰ By invoking queer desire in spectral terms, I am thinking alongside Carla Freccero, especially the ways in which she brings together deconstruction and psychoanalytical theory to construct a queer historiographical methodology that is responsive to ethical and erotic hauntings of the past in the present. See especially the concluding chapter titled “Queer Spectrality,” of Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

¹¹ Aḥmad Sa‘īd, *Zikr-i Majzūb: Tazkirah-yi Khwāja ‘Azīz al-Ḥasan Majzūb Ghawrī* (Lahore: Maktaba-yi Ihyā al-‘ulūm al-sharqiyya, 1974), 58.

queerness was split between being and nothingness, life and death, man and woman. Spectral queerness of this sort was violently enabling and regressively progressive, but also expressively repressive and invigoratingly deathly. In refusing the naming and liberating impulses of modern biopoliticized sexuality and unstitching the straight seams of heteronormativity, the spectral queerness we encounter in the archives of Muslim orthodoxy also foreclosed the coming out of the queer.¹²

Desire and Sublimation in South Asian Muslim Orthodoxy

How did Indo-Muslim traditionalists understand intimacy and desire before the nineteenth century? South Asian Muslim traditionalism has to be understood as a subsection of Indo-Muslim society, a network of cross-cultural traditions, values, and practices spanning more than a millennium. Indo-Muslim matrices of intimacy and sexual practices thus mirrored what was customary in Hindu India but also what was prevalent in the Middle East and Islamicate central Asia. While heterosexual marriage was the norm, a colorful range of other inclinations and acts was widespread in urban settings. Indo-Muslim society thus accommodated subcultures of hermaphrodites, courtesan parlors, and beardless lads. Muslim India shared with other Islamicate settings a general tolerance for lovers and beloveds not restrained by reproductive sexual relations. It was possible for a devout Muslim in medieval Delhi to fall in love, so to speak, with a Hindu

¹² In this regard, Anjali Arondekar's call for a careful hermeneutic dealing with the archives might prove useful for thinking about Islamicate sexualities. Arondekar interrogates the evidentiary and historical status of the archives, arguing that instead of turning to the archives to reveal the "open secret" of homosexuality, a turn that reifies the heteronormative imperatives of the epistemological structure of the closet, we should see the archives as sites of indeterminacy, conflict, and multiplicity. See Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

youth. The celebrated Indo-Muslim poet and lay ṣūfī Amīr Khusrau (1253-1325) captured a similar erotic sentiment in these lines of his narrative poem (*masnawī*):

Delhi and its fine lads
with their turbans and twisted beards
openly drinking lovers' blood
while secretly sipping wine.

Wilful and full of airs
they pay no heed to anyone.

So close to the heart, they rob
your soul and tuck it safely away.

When they are out for a stroll
rose bushes bloom in the street.

When the breeze strikes them from behind,
see how the turbans topple from their heads.

When they walk, the lovers follow,
blood gushing from their eyes.

Their hands puffed up with beauty's pride,
their admirers' hearts are gone with the wind.

These cheeky, simple Indian lads have made
Muslims into worshippers of the sun.

Those fair Hindu boys
have led me to drunken ruin.
Trapped in the coils of their curly locks
Khusrau is a dog on a leash.¹³

¹³ Amīr Khusrau, *In the Bazaar of Love: The Selected Poetry of Amir Khusrau*, trans. Paul E. Losensky and Sunil Sharma (New Delhi and New York: Penguin, 2011), 93-94. According to Sunil Sharma, "the seemingly blasphemous imagery employed here, and the homoerotic element, are...typical of Persian poetry and do not necessarily represent a reality. This was a highly coded language in which poets communicated with their audience and with each other" (Sunil Sharma, *Amir Khusrau: The Poet of Sultans and Sufis* [Oxford: Oneworld, 2005], 24). I do not insist that Amīr Khusrau spoke of his "own" desire for the young lads of Delhi. Instead, this desire was utterly textual, and served rhetorical purposes. These textual purposes could have included the enunciation of a *coded* desire that transcended normative forms of desire.

Indo-Muslim literary archives yield many similar examples of an aura of free-floating intimacy in pre-modern and early modern South Asian Islamicate society.

At the same time, Indo-Muslim traditionalists embraced a stricter form of piety and chastity. Indo-Muslim traditionalists listened first and foremost to the Qur'ān: "Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and to be modest. That is purer for them. Indeed God is aware of what they do. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to be modest..." (Qur'ān 24:30-31). This Qur'ānic verse found mention in a letter written to a dutiful female disciple by the *ṣūfī*-jurist Aḥmad Sirhindī (1563-1624), one of the foremost representatives of Indo-Muslim traditionalism. In this letter, Sirhindī addressed women's formal induction into *ṣūfī* orders. He emphasized chastity as one of the prerequisites of the initiatory pledge. In this discussion, he cited Qur'ān 24:30-31 and provided a lengthy gloss that reinforced pious norms of chastity. I offer here a substantial excerpt from Sirhindī's letter:

Know that the heart follows the eye. Safeguarding your heart is nearly impossible unless you are able to eschew gazing at illicit objects. Safeguarding your heart becomes arduous when the eye succumbs to evil. When the heart succumbs, it becomes nearly impossible to safeguard the sexual organs. Thus it is necessary to protect the eye from gazing at illicit objects in order to ensure the chastity of the sexual organs...Know that a young woman can be just like a young man in terms of gazing lustfully at and touching another woman. It is impermissible for a woman to reveal her beauty and to adorn herself for the sake of anyone other than her husband, whether these others are men or women. Just as it is illicit for a man to gaze lustfully at or to touch beardless lads or adolescent boys, it is also illicit for a woman to gaze lustfully at or to touch women...It is hard for men to reach women because their genders (*jins*) are different, as there are many obstacles [i.e. in terms of living arrangements] between the two genders. However, it is easy for two women to make contact, for both

share the same gender and living arrangement. Therefore, you should be more cautious in these matters.¹⁴

This passage portrayed Sirhindī's assumptions about desire and gender: desire runs across and within genders. Sirhindī regulated three species of desire: heterosexual, female homoerotic, and male homoerotic desires. Moreover, this passage documented gender segregation and homosocial forms of living arrangements in Indo-Muslim society. Women's domestic spaces—the *zenāna*—continued well into British India.

Sirhindī's piety-minded discourse was powerful for many, but it did not determine the everyday social behavior of all North Indian Muslims. Some Muslim intellectuals reared in traditionalist spaces straddled different social worlds: the mosque, the *ṣūfī* lodge, the poet's gathering, the royal court, and urban streets. These varied spaces addressed different parts of their subjectivities, from piety to passion, ethics to aesthetics. Many Muslim intellectuals in cities such as Delhi and Lucknow enjoyed the diverse social activities of these vibrant urbanscapes. For instance, the early Urdu poet Mīr Muḥammad Taqī (1723-1810) came from a traditionalist family but embraced inclinations and practices that exceeded traditionalism. Mīr was among the generation who witnessed the downfall of Delhi when the city was ransacked by Afghan warlords and Maratha forces. Observe how the following lines from his autobiography retrospectively recreated a romanticized Delhi once inhabited by lovers and beloveds:

Suddenly I found myself in the neighbourhood where I had lived—where I gathered my friends and recited verses; where I lived the life of love and cried many a night; where I fell in love with slim and tall [beloveds] and sang high their praises; where I spent time with those who had long

¹⁴ Aḥmad Sirhindī, *Maktūbāt-i Imām-i Rabbānī*, trans. Qāḍī 'Ālam al-Dīn Naqshbandī Mujaddadī (Lahore: Islāmī Kutub Khāna, n.d.), vols. 2-3:428-429 [Volume 3; Letter 41].

ringlets and where I adored the beautiful ones...[But now] no familiar face came into sight so I could spend a few happy moments with him.¹⁵

These lines captured the spectacle of intimacy shared by some intellectual elites of eighteenth-century Delhi. Mīr's longing for "the beautiful ones," his preference for "slim and tall beloveds," and his "life of love" was not rhetorical embellishment alone. He was romantically involved with the handsome Urdu poet 'Abd al-Ḥayy Tabān (1715-1749). The latter was also "the beloved" of the famed Muslim theologian and Indo-Persian poet Mirzā Maẓhar Jān-i Jānan (1699-1781).¹⁶ Mīr's world thus overlapped with the circles of traditionalist Muslim theologians and poets.

Mirzā Maẓhar Jān-i Jānan was a reputable theologian and ṣūfī affiliated with the Naqshbandī order.¹⁷ Brief anecdotes about his love for Tabān and homoerotic encounters survived not only in literary volumes but also in traditionalist hagiographies. In fact, a vague report about his relationship with men appeared in *Arwāḥ-i salāsa*, an edited volume of hagiographical anecdotes about latter-day Indo-Muslim luminaries compiled by Thānvī, Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib Qāsimī, and Amīr Shāh Khān. The latter reported a lengthy story about Mirzā Maẓhar's unusual weekly habit following the Friday prayers.

The story went something like this: after attending the Friday prayer each week, Mirzā Maẓhar would exit Delhi's Jāmi' Mosque from its east gate. His wrath always descended upon an old saint-like man sitting near the east gate on a prayer rug with a water jug and a brick. Mirzā Maẓhar would physically and verbally abuse the old man, breaking his water jug and throwing away his brick. People could not understand the

¹⁵ Mīr Muḥammad Taqī, *Zikr-i Mir*, trans. C.M. Naim (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 94.

¹⁶ Tariq Rahman, "Boy-Love in the Urdu Ghazal." *Annual of Urdu Studies* 7 (1990): 8-9.

¹⁷ The most resourceful volume on the life and times of Mirzā Maẓhar Jān-i Jānan is Shāh Ghulām 'Alī's *Maqāmāt-i Maẓharī*, ed. Muḥammad Iqbāl Mujaddadī (Lahore: Urdu Science Board, 1983).

theologian's rash and rude behavior. Given Mirzā Maẓhar's dispositional strictness, people were afraid to ask him why he engaged in this bad-mannered act. The day someone mustered the courage to inquire about this act, Mirzā Maẓhar explained:

He was one of our lovers when we were young. He used to visit us. We engaged in frivolous games. As I grew old, my lovers departed this world, one by one. Except this man who continued seeing me. God then guided me. I turned to ṣūfism and with God's grace I received authorization to initiate others. One day I thought about this man: I should show him kindness for he was affectionate toward me. When I visited him, however, I lost myself in his reflection (*'aks*). I saw that he occupied a spiritual station higher than mine. I became anxious for avoiding him and started to revere him. I offered him my [worldly] position, but he refused, insisting that I treat him the same as before I knew of his hidden powers. I disagreed with him and refused to avoid him any longer. He then withdrew all my spirituality, leaving me a wretched. I became perturbed and beseeched him to restore my [spiritual] condition (*kayfiyat*). He replied that he would return my *kayfiyat* to me on the condition that I continue debasing him, not in privacy, but in broad daylight in the Jāmi' Mosque.¹⁸

This anecdote mixes erotic and spiritual dimensions of lived experience because the two were inseparable for Mirzā Maẓhar. The latter recognized the power of sensual love to help one progress on the path of divine love. The wording of the story furnishes evidence to state that Mirzā Maẓhar had intimate interactions with men. However, no conclusive statements can be made with reference to the traditionalist sage's type of relation (platonic or sexual) or type of identity (homosexual or heterosexual). In fact, the use of identity categories to describe sexual inclinations and acts is altogether anachronistic in this context. Mirzā Maẓhar had homoerotic encounters with men. Homoeroticism between men was a symptom of gender segregation and homosocial spaces, which are two social phenomena well documented by scholars of Indo-Muslim culture. Gender

¹⁸ Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib Qāsimī, and Amīr Shāh Khān *Arwāḥ-i salāsa*, ed. Ẓuhūr al-Ḥasan (Lahore: Maktaba-yi Raḥmāniyya, n.d.), 23-24.

segregated spaces and its attendant homosocial forms of intimacy only started to wane in Indo-Muslim culture beginning in the late colonial period.

The colonial time period (roughly from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries) was an immensely transformative segment of this society, for its earlier fusion of Arab, Persian, Turkic, and Hindu cultures encountered European ideas and institutions. The colonial period lifted up a mirror to Indo-Muslim society, enabling elite intellectuals—men and women of letters—to evaluate their social norms in terms of modern European sensibilities. Thus, beginning in the eighteenth century, but especially in the nineteenth century, Indo-Muslim intellectuals started to apologize for a range of illicit sexual inclinations and practices found in their pre-modern society. A key example comes from Shāh Ismā‘īl Shahīd’s *Şirāṭ-i mustaqīm*, a text I discussed briefly in the previous chapter. Shāh Ismā‘īl Shahīd’s mentor distinguished between “passionate love” and “rational love.” The former blinded the lover before the beloved, while the latter enlightened the lover with the knowledge of the beloved. Shāh Ismā‘īl Shahīd then argued that it was possible to become passionate for something entirely detestable, since passion was not regulated by reason. The example he furnished to underscore this point reveals his take on extra-martial sexual relations and homoerotic attachment:

Take, for example, the case of a religious-minded youth, who is devoted to his parents, but falls in love with a woman or a beardless lad. From the depths of his heart he knows that this passionate affair is detestable, even if he temporarily succumbs to its sensual demands. He detests it because the objects of his rational love, namely his parents and the moral law, reprimand this passionate affair.¹⁹

¹⁹ Shāh Ismā‘īl Shahīd, *Şirāṭ-i mustaqīm*, 17.

It is noteworthy that for Shāh Ismā‘īl Shahīd, extra-marital and homoerotic love affairs were both instances of passion (‘*ishq*) or affective love (*maḥabba ṭab‘iyya*). This statement did not categorically condemn homoerotic inclination or act, but affirmed the ephemeral nature of passion. The rational person, it was argued, always preferred the everlasting to the ephemeral. Thānvī inherited from Shāh Ismā‘īl Shahīd and his mentor Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd the distinction between rational love and affective love and deployed it to help disciples adjudicate between various species of desire.

Thānvī thus re-enlivened in the late colonial context the chastity-driven traditionalist rhetoric of luminaries such as Sirhindī, Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd, and Shāh Ismā‘īl Shahīd. Thānvī experimented with several technologies of the self in order to make his disciples adhere to the letter of Muslim juridical-moral normativity. He exercised immense authority over the lives of thousands of disciples in British India, often dealing with some of their most intimate concerns, including those related to sexual desire. His disciples mentioned to him the scenes of their embodied desire in person and by means of correspondence. These epistles and Thanvī’s replies were initially published in the monthly journal of his ṣūfī lodge. In the late 1920s and the early 1930s, Thānvī’s disciple ‘Abd al-Majīd edited and published these letters in *Tarbiyat al-sālik* (*Tutelage for the Seeker*).²⁰ This volume was put together for Thānvī’s trained successors who could use the text to guide their own disciples. After Thānvī’s death in 1943, his close associates published a supplemental second volume to this extensive text that consisted of correspondence from 1931 to 1943. In the following decades, *Tarbiyat al-sālik* became almost extinct in the religious bookstores of postcolonial India and Pakistan until

²⁰ Aḥmad Sa‘īd, *Bazm-i Ashraf ke chirāgh* (Lahore: Miṣbāḥ Academy, 1992), 61-63.

renewed interest in this text sparked its republication in Karachi in the mid-1980s. The 1990 edited volume of Thānvī's recorder conversations, entitled *Al-'Ilm wa'l-'ulamā'* (*Knowledge and the Learned Elite*), also contained brief passages about regulating male homosexual desire.

A more conservative approach to Thānvī's archives would demarcate such marginal stuff as irrelevant. In fact, his present-day followers, who are active in India and Pakistan but also in Western urban centers such as London and Chicago, would most likely explain my archival examples otherwise so that these passages conform to heteronormative senses of sexual difference and sexual desire. I resist this approach not only to challenge the marginalization of passages pertaining to "male homosocial desire," but also to acknowledge the possibilities of the *implicit* inscription of such a desire in the organizing logic of Muslim orthodox archives. What I offer here is *explicitly* in the domain of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls "male homosocial desire," a spectrum of relations between men that encompasses both the socio-material intersubjective aura of homosociality and the psycho-erotic interaffective context of homosexuality. I share Sedgwick's commitment to treat this analytic strategically rather than genetically "for making generalizations about, and marking historical differences in, the *structure* of men's relations with other men."²¹

Constant Cravings of the Split Subject

Thānvī's teaching on desire and sublimation was interspersed throughout his printed sermons, recorded conversations, and in his correspondence. Thānvī dealt with

²¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 2.

homoerotic desire by separating inclination from action. He comforted his disciples when they complained of worry and anxiety due to this desire. He pointed out that inclination of any sort was beyond one's control and one was only responsible for volitional actions. This engagement with homoerotic inclination differs from post-colonial condemnations and stigmatizations of homosexuality in orthodox Muslim spaces.

Thānvī died in 1943, four years before the partition of India in 1947. While some of his disciples relocated to Pakistan, many of them remained in India. Over the last sixty years or so, almost every major urban center in South Asia features an orthodox *madrasa* wherein Thānvī's writings are considered authoritative on matters of Muslim doctrine and practice. Such spaces are unsurprisingly paradoxical: at once they are hotbeds of homophobic impulses and of homoerotic desire. As Ebrahim Moosa recalls his personal experiences in the 1970s when he left South Africa and travelled to India to pursue his theological studies at a traditionalist *madrasa*:

As I adjusted to my new life, I also learned that my naive views about madrasas were not immune to contradiction. Puritanism reigned, and sex was taboo. I recall one evening in Bangalore when the Cuban student raised the alarm in the dorms, claiming that he had caught two Indian students in a homosexual embrace in the bathroom. I was scandalized, and the revelation haunted me for weeks. At home and in the madrasa I was taught that heterosexual conduct outside marriage was forbidden (and had life-threatening consequences); homosexuality was an unthinkable abomination.²²

The contemporary theologians who claim to follow Thānvī will on occasion condemn homosexuality in their speeches and publications, creating a homophobic atmosphere in which queer desire is strictly disciplined.

²² Ebrahim Moosa, "Inside Madrasa: A Personal History," *Boston Review* (Jan.-Feb. 2007). <http://bostonreview.net/BR32.1/moosa.php>

Thānvī's postcolonial followers accentuated the prohibition on same-sex inclination and action. One of Thānvī's most successful ṣūfī followers was the Karachi-based mystic and scholar Ḥakīm Muḥammad Akhtar (1928-2013).²³ As a *madrassa* student in the United Provinces in the early 1940s, Akhtar experienced an intense spiritual awakening when he read Thānvī's printed sermon, *The Tranquillity of Hearts* (*Rāḥat al-qulūb*).²⁴ Akhtar wrote to Thānvī, expressing his desire to take the initiatory ṣūfī pledge and join the master's spiritual fellowship. On behalf of Thānvī, Mawlānā Shabbīr 'Alī advised Akhtar to approach Mawlānā 'Abd al-Ghanī Phūlpūrī (d. 1963), one of Thānvī's premier successors in North India.¹ Akhtar followed this advice and devoted himself entirely to Phūlpūrī. After the partition of India, Phūlpūrī and Akhtar relocated to Karachi where they fostered a substantial community of devotees and ṣūfī initiates. Akhtar's global travels and scores of followers among the South Asian Muslim diaspora internationalized Thānvī's ṣūfī order. Akhtar pointedly addressed self-discipline, especially disciplining desire and sexual inclination, throughout his sermons. The themes of passion, pain, and piety penetrated Akhtar's printed and digital sermons. Akhtar invoked Thānvī's teaching on desire and sublimation to condemn homosexuality, masturbation, extra-marital love affairs, and so on.²⁵

In postcoloniality, it is hard to disaggregate epistemological claims of queer desire

²³ For a biographical note, see Muḥammad Akbar Shāh Bukhārī, *Akābir-i 'ulamā'-yi Deoband* (Lahore: Idāra-yi Islāmiyyat, 1999), 512-516. Akhtar's ṣūfī lodge in Karachi has its own website, where many of his sermons can be accessed: <http://www.khanqah.org>

²⁴ Thānvī delivered this lecture in December 1915 in Jalalabad, Uttar Pradesh, India. The lecture discussed the merits of remembrance of God (*zikr*) and preparation for the life after death. It was resplendent with citations from Arabic and Persian mystical poetry and hagiographies of Chishtī saints. See Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 22:217-267.

²⁵ See especially the first 120 or so pages of the following book: Ḥakīm Muḥammad Akhtar, *Rūḥ kī bīmāriyan awr unkā 'ilāj* (Karachi: Kutub Khāna Maḥzarī, n.d.). The book is also available here: <http://www.khanqah.org/books/show/rooh-ki-bemariyan-aur-un-ka-ilaj>

and the epistemic biopolitical territorialization of such desire as constitutive of identity. Thānvī did not embrace admissions of same-sex desire, but he did not count such admissions as revelatory or constitutive of identity either. A certain stigmatization of same-sex or queer desire (often by linking it to identity) that operates in globalization is a postcolonial historical development. It should come as no surprise then that traditionalist Muslim spaces host and authorize this stigmatization in ways comparable to other traditional social and cultural forms of modernity. However, unlike Joseph Massad, for whom the repudiation of homosexual desire in Arab contexts is symptomatic of the internalization of a “Victorian sexual ethic” by the natives in the context of colonialism, I find it more persuasive to count the juridical-moral discourses of Muslim orthodoxy as other possible sources of this repudiation of homosexual desires and acts.²⁶ Thānvī’s repudiation of same-sex desire in colonial India was certainly linked to the history of Islamic law and ethics that went back to Central Asia, but more importantly to Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, three strongholds of Ḥanafī legal thought and practice. We should remember that Ottoman authorities implemented Ḥanafī juridical-moral norms in the Arab settings that were later colonized by European powers and exposed to cultural trends such as the Victorian sexual ethic. Thus, a mixture of local and colonial moral discourses accounted for the repudiations of homosexuality in modern Arab and Islamic contexts. In other words, I hesitate to put the blame entirely on Victorian norms for the repudiation of homosexuality that characterizes colonial and postcolonial Arab and Muslim thought-systems and paradigms of social practice.

²⁶ Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 53.

When perusing Thānvī's *Tarbiyat al-sālik* the reader encounters anonymous people at different stages of their ṣūfī self-reformation programs. In making these epistles available to a readership beyond his ṣūfī lodge, the editor omitted all biographical details that would have disclosed the disciple's identity. Certain innocuous biographical details were left unaltered. *Tarbiyat al-sālik* as an epistolary archive yields a world of representations about the ordinary activities, concerns, and feelings of a community of Indian Muslims whose intimacy, desire, and forms of affective attachment have not preoccupied scholars in Islamic studies or South Asian history. If this archive shares with us the texture of negotiations that animated the ontic conditions of early twentieth century North Indian Muslim traditionalists, it does so selectively and strategically but also against its own wishes (or perhaps it wishes to self-indulge in making impure its purity). What is given to us therefore both preserves the moral standards of Muslim piety and betrays these norms by exposing to us those forms of deathly desires that were antithetical to Muslim piety (I will say more on death in the following pages).

We read in *Tarbiyat al-sālik* of a disciple who wrote to Thānvī complaining of his desire for another man. Thānvī had apparently inquired in a previous letter as to the whereabouts of the man's beloved.²⁷ The disciple reported, "He is also in Delhi, where I live. His house is in the same neighborhood as my house. In fact, his house is besides mine." The disciple continued to give more details to answer Thānvī's simple question, "where is he?" The further details explained that the disciple was of the same age and attended the same primary as his "beloved." This somewhat excessive information identified in shared space the origin of the man's homoerotic attachment. The importance

²⁷ Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik* (Karachi: Dār al-Ishā'at, 1988), 1:267.

of shared space for the formation of intimate relations cannot be underestimated, as it is living besides one another *where* relations of various sorts come to *matter*.²⁸

Thānvī further asked him, “Does he even greet you or not?”²⁹ To this question, the disciple replied: “Even though he greets me, a month has passed and we have not conversed at all. I come to think of him during my daily prayers. I beseech you to advise me of a strategy through which thoughts of him could be dispelled from my mind.”³⁰ It is possible that this particular disciple had internalized a proto form of homosexual self-hatred. However, this seeming regulation of homosexual desire might also have been a technology of the self that was indifferent to the human identity of the object of desire. What mattered in such mystical spaces was inculcating within oneself a certain type of self-mastery through ritualized forms of meditation. The point was not to extinguish desire, but to stare in the face of the primordial drive that structured desire and to institute it otherwise, to drive it towards a divine object without lack. Within *ṣūfī* imagination, desire shed the identity of its earthly objects as it took flight to an elsewhere that was wholly metaphysical yet experienced immanently.

Thānvī mobilized a psychological understanding of human subjectivity in order to acknowledge that desire was the function of an internal drive. It was important to know the origin of desire, for this knowledge aided in sublimating desire. Thānvī wrote to him: “If you cannot leave him entirely, then the least you could do is to never gaze at him

²⁸ For a queer theoretical orientation of space, see Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). For a lucid but preliminary queer theoretical exploration of space, consult chapter one of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

²⁹ Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik*, 1:267.

³⁰ Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik*, 1:267.

willingly.”³¹ Note how Thānvī’s prescriptive voice assumed a difference between the internal, conscious abandoning of the object of desire and the external, behavioral abstinence from scopophilia. The gaze, for Thānvī, was not the spontaneous or sudden look, but the comingling of the inner and the outer, the desire and the eye, in the operation of pleasure. Thānvī understood that an individual’s everyday existence was not divided along the body-mind binary. Rather, interiority and exteriority were different conceptualities that he deployed to examine the human subject. He acknowledged lines of correspondence between the unintentional, intentionality, and voluntary bodily actions.

Thānvī further advised the disciple: “If you ever encounter him, then leave him immediately. Never think of him intentionally, in your heart.”³² Here it becomes explicit how Thānvī not only assumed the external-internal division characteristic of classical ṣūfī discourses, but added to them the dimension of a further split within the inside: a conscious, calculating, and cognitive self and an unintentional, incalculable, and unknowing psyche. Thānvī complicated ṣūfī notions of subjectivity as inner (the heart-based soul) and outer (the flesh-based body) by insisting on a division within the inner. He named this division “intentional” (*ikhtiyārī*) and “unintentional” (*ghayr ikhtiyārī*), and invoked it throughout his texts to outline the limits of human agency and responsibility. From his point of view, one was only responsible for intentional and voluntary thoughts and actions and not spontaneous unintentional and involuntary thoughts or actions.

For Thānvī, intentionality presupposed embodiment, albeit in different ways and in various styles. From his perspective, a person who intended in the morning to walk in

³¹ Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik*, 1:267.

³² Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik*, 1:267.

the afternoon had already initiated the action of walking since intention as the primary mode of an action. The movement of the limbs in the afternoon was another mode of the action. The body's expressions worked in tandem with networks of motivational drives and willing intentions. Thus when the "raw" impulses of the drive were expressed in homoerotic forms, Thānvī used the disciplinary tools provided by Muslim eschatological discourses to straighten the drive's queer bents. This is one way we could read his continued preaching to the same disciple: "Never speak of him with your tongue. If thoughts of him ever creep in your heart involuntarily, then immediately call to your mind and heart the image of his face subjected to bodily decomposition that overtakes a corpse after death."³³ Through this severe measure, Thānvī taught the disciple how he could cope with unwanted pleasures by turning the possible causes of these pleasures into sources of displeasure. Thus, he advised the disciple to picture the face of the object of desire in a decomposed form. This can be called a maneuvering of counter-fantasy. Whether pleasure or displeasure, fantasy or counter-fantasy, what we have here is a highly charged erotic exchange that provided the fodder for the discursive narrativization of unnameable impulses of the drive into self-disciplined juridical-moral correctness.

Thānvī continued: "When you bring this image to attention, then ask yourself: if his shape and form will eventually decompose, should I give all of my heart to him? No! You should give your heart only to the divine being. God's beauty and radiance never cease nor disappear. Along with this, imagine your own death as well."³⁴ Strikingly, in order to curb queer desire, Thānvī invoked death and then the sublimation of the

³³ Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik*, 1:267.

³⁴ Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik*, 1:267.

symptom onto God. In more than one way, here Thānvī's words exemplified what Lee Edelman argues with reference to queer desire and normative social forms: "As the constancy of a pressure both alien and internal to the logic of the Symbolic, as the inarticulable surplus that dismantles the subject from within, the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability."³⁵ This exchange between Thānvī and his disciple illustrated how the notion of the split subject was put to the service of strengthening the voluntary/intentional side of the self so to (1) identify everything that pertained to erratic desire as being caused by the unintentional/involuntary psyche; (2) to repress the involuntary/the unintentional through fearful invocations of death; and (3) to use this therapeutic technique for inscribing a particular form of juridical-moral normativity onto the subject. In this passage, the expression of queer desire lasted long enough to be sublimated, as its full coming out was nothing short of death.

Married with Anxiety

Thānvī deployed a fairly complex picture of human psychology to secure the heteronormative concerns of traditionalist Muslim legal ethics. My second passage from *Tarbiyat al-sālik* presents the case of a man's troubled marital life. A disciple poured out his heart when speaking of his marriage troubles. He used the expression, "full of pain" (*dard nāk*), to describe his situation. "The woman I am bound to in matrimony," he wrote, "her and I are a couple with completely clashing dispositions."³⁶ Calling his wife his "companion in fate" (*sharīk-i qismat*), he absolved her of any deficiency or blame:

³⁵ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 9.

³⁶ Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik*, 1:368.

“In reality she is flawless, the trouble is due to my unusual temperament.”³⁷ I translate the Urdu expression, *anokhī ṭabī‘at*, as “unusual temperament.” However, a more liberal translation would be “queer disposition,” as the Urdu word, *anokhī*, connotes both uniqueness and strangeness.

A certain sense of anxiety resulting out of this “strange” entrapment within heterosexual domesticity seemed to pervade this disciple’s narration. Observe how he continued the story of his sorrows: “Because of our mutual psychological differences (*mukhtaliḥ al-khayālī*), instead of affection and love a barrier of otherness and separation has emerged between us, and this barrier becomes stronger day by day.”³⁸ The man attributed feelings of loneliness and otherness in his marriage to these unspecified psychological differences. The man’s further description of his condition did not specify the aforementioned psychological differences. Rather, he moved into a description of the material effects of his anxiety on his business and body: “I cannot even begin to describe how this domestic disturbance has devastated my life and my business.”³⁹ Was he trying to convey to Thānvī the chilling effects of repressing extra-marital sexual desires? While archival ambiguity does not permit a conclusive answer, it seems that the man was anxious about the institution of marriage and heterosexual coupledness. Whatever the

³⁷ Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik*, 1:369.

³⁸ My usage of the word, “psychological,” to explain the Urdu expression, *mukhtaliḥ al-khayālī*, requires some elaboration. The word, *khayāl*, in the Urdu language, covers a range of connotations: thought, conception, opinion, fancy, imagination, and concern. *Khayāl* can therefore refer to cognitive content and/or psychic content. Based on the mood assumed in this letter, it is better to translate *mukhtaliḥ al-khayālī* as “psychological differences” with the caveat that cognitive differences of opinion could also be formed by and formative of the psychic. Etymologically, *khayāl* is an Arabic word, which not only has connotations of cognition, but also spectrality and ghostliness. In particular, the word, *khayāla*, refers to apparitions, fantasies, and ghosts.

³⁹ Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik*, 1:369.

foreclosed details, his particular situation had rendered his life quite unliveable, and he grieved this dead life in multiple ways.

The disciple continued his narration to Thānvī: “A perpetual melancholia (*dā'imī afsurdgī*) surrounds me from all four sides.”⁴⁰ The disciple had more heart to pour out in bleak terms: “Since childhood, I had always imagined a bright future for myself. However, now my future has shattered completely. These feelings of despondency and hopelessness have injured my world and my religion.”⁴¹ The man appealed to Thānvī to take him under his tutelage and guidance: “You are a wise elder and a holy man. Please turn your attention to me. Pray for me, so that God relieves me from this worrisome condition (*pareshānī*) and I attain peace of mind in one way or another.”⁴² People who turned to Thānvī often made such requests, most of which Thānvī accepted by providing them counsel through his religious self-reformation programs or by giving them refuge in his ṣūfī lodge.

In this particular case, the man reported that he had been suffering from such anxiety for three years. Calling his experiences a form of “painful punishment” (*'azab-i alīm*), he wrote: “I wish for my death.”⁴³ This last description topped all others in which he described his pain. To escape his suicidal thoughts, he sought refuge in Thānvī and inquired about the possibility of joining Thānvī's ṣūfī fellowship in Thana Bhawan. Thānvī wrote back with comforting words of assurance and invited him to spend some time in his company, but still encouraged him to continue the struggle and practice patience, as he was already involved in the sort of self-disciplining trials and tribulations

⁴⁰ Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik*, 1:369.

⁴¹ Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik*, 1:369.

⁴² Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik*, 1:369.

⁴³ Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik*, 1:369.

needed for moral self-reformation.⁴⁴ Thānvī insisted that such pain was inscribed within ṣūfī struggles. In other words, the man was already on a path of self-reformation, which was the aim of Thānvī's therapy techniques. If things became unbearable, Thānvī invited him to spend time in his lodge. This last option was to train the disciple further in learning how to live with the pain, to manage one's anxiety, and to welcome the undoing of the self that was provoked by anxiety. While this example does not necessarily present a case of closeted homosexual desire in Thānvī's orthodox circles, it does affirm certain troubles within heterosexual arrangements of kinship and intimacy.

Impersonal Attachments

Muslim theologians such as Thānvī were well equipped with discursive strategies when it came to sublimating erotic passions and fantasies. In another passage from *Tarbiyat al-sālik* we read of how psychosexual anxiety often emerged within legal frameworks that imposed certain heteronymous rules and norms on the moral subject. People writing to Thānvī had presupposed notions of particular legal injunctions of Muslim juridical-moral normativity, and if they did not, he made sure that they were familiar with these rules. Failure to live up to the standards of the law in matters of doctrine, ritual practice, and personal behavior was itself an anxiety-ridden problem. Living with and by the law was important for Thānvī and for those who came under his discipleship. The following exchange is a fascinating example in which anxiety enunciated itself through concerns of legality. In these letters, two men—Thānvī and a disciple—contemplated the legal limits of desire in relation to a dead woman.

⁴⁴ Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik*, 1:369.

This passage pertained to a disciple's fantasies about his dead wife, an erotico-fantasmatic formation through which he attained sexual pleasure. According to the legal rules that governed Thānvī's thought, the relationship between a husband and a wife was severed through the event of either's death. This particular correspondence consisted of four exchanges. Each exchange in *Tarbiyat al-sālik* included the question, which was called *ḥāl* (condition), and Thānvī's reply, which was called *taḥqīq* (investigation from a qualified ṣūfī who was equipped to investigate matters pertaining to self-reformation). I reproduce the entire correspondence here to show the importance of form and flow:

Condition (*ḥāl*): Because marital relationship ends with death, is it permissible to obtain pleasure from recounting previous experiences or the image of one's wife?

Reply (*taḥqīq*): This pleasure entails bringing to consciousness a permissible event of the past. This is presencing of memory and not fantasy. The ruling here differs from fantasizing about your divorcee who is alive. The form of pleasure involved in the latter case results out of fantasy and is therefore impermissible (*ḥarām*).

Condition (*ḥāl*): Sometimes my ego (*naḥs*) invents an image by itself without specifying whose image it is, and then it pleasures itself by means of this image. This is surely madness, but does such a fantasy also transgress the law, making one disobedient?

Reply (*taḥqīq*): This is hardly possible! Pleasure requires particular, identifiable objects of desire. However, if someone is able to obtain pleasure by means of impersonal images, then such imagining would be included under the general coverage of the Qur'ānic verse: "But whoever seeks beyond that, then those are the transgressors" (Qur'ān 23:7). Therefore, it is impermissible to invent images for self-pleasure, as these invented images are neither of one's wife nor of one's slave-girl. That is why it would be a "seeking beyond" the licit.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik*, 1:358. Thānvī also dealt with this issue in the context of a *fatwa*. See Thānvī, *Bawādir al-nawādir*, 798-801.

The disciple wanted to know if he could continue to replay in his mind certain scenarios of sexual desire with his wife even after her death. Longing for ecstatic moments of romance, and finding memories, images, and ghosts of the dead within him, the disciple confronted the limits of licit pleasure. Thānvī helped him understand how his autonomy was limited by the line a heteronymous law drew around his pleasure. Haunted by the fantastic potential of the image of the wife, he asked: “Is not attaining pleasure...impermissible?” Thānvī’s reply to this question deserves some elaboration. Thānvī differentiated between retrieving the memory of permissible pleasure (even when the object of desire was dead) versus those moments in which one reintroduces a living divorcee into one’s visual field of fantasy. Thānvī did not say anything definitive about the first scenario, as he did not consider it problematic to remember one’s sexual experiences with a deceased spouse. The second scenario—pleasuring oneself by thinking about a living divorcee—was problematic, for it was a function of fantasy and not memory. Note the distinction he made between the cessation of marriage through death and marital separation through divorce. Sacred law identified certain procedures for mourning the dead wife. These procedures included giving her a bath, praying for her, and burying her. Supererogatory rituals in which people gathered to recite the Qur’ān for her soul or distribute alms in her memory sometimes followed these compulsory rites of burial. This was how sacred law identified the proper method for mourning one’s wife. The disciple’s letter to Thānvī evidenced that there were extra-legal ways to mourn the wife. While she had retired into another world according to Muslim doctrine, her memory lingered on. These lingering memories brought pleasure to the husband, who was worried about transgressing the moral law.

The legal ways in which the wife was mourned did not inter her into an irretrievable crypt for this husband. He yearned for her and presented the memory of being-with-her, yet he was anxious about honoring his commitment to the law of the Other. By changing the subject to fantastic memories of the divorcee, Thānvī affirmed the permissibility of the man’s memory-based pleasure. The questioner’s next inquiry indicated how Thānvī’s reply might have unfurled another anxious quandary. The disciple now asked about the permissibility of inventing an impersonal image as the object of desire and the guarantor of pleasure.

The disciple alluded to impersonal objects of desire, somewhat akin to what psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas pathologizes as “‘it-to-it’ encounters” in which individuals assume the object of their sexual desires to be “an impersonal third person singular, a transitional sexual self, or an ‘it’.”⁴⁶ Bollas attributes the emergence of such impersonal desire in mostly gay men as attempts to “objectify a self fractured by desire.”⁴⁷ Thānvī’s disciple was anxious about the impersonality of desire. He located his inquiry in hysteric territory: “This is surely madness, but does such a fantasy also implicate one in crossing the limits of the law, entering one into disobedience?” The disciple’s anxiety confirmed that impersonal forms of desire produce anxiety, which only withers away when one finds meaning in personal relationships. This line of questioning between a disciple and Thānvī revealed what the ṣūfī master thought about impersonal desire.

⁴⁶ Christopher Bollas, *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 148.

⁴⁷ Bollas, *Being a Character*, 156.

Thānvī replied that pleasure from impersonal objects of desire was usually not possible. Nonetheless, if realizing pleasure from impersonal object(s) of desire was possible, then such inventions constituted transgression. In this case, both Bollas and Thānvī foreclosed the potential possibilities of impersonal desire as an arrangement or expression of sexuality. Contra Bollas and Thānvī, Tim Dean argues that the general structure of the sexual is impersonal: “Desire and fantasy involve an object—Lacan’s *objet petit a*—that is not a person and is prior to gender.”⁴⁸ By articulating Lacan to sexuality and gender, Dean depathologizes queer forms of relationality and ways of dwelling that do not amount to intersubjectivity. Dean’s approach attempts to dismantle the promise of the social world of autonomous subjects who assume a natural relationship of necessity between consciousness and sexuality. For Dean, psychoanalysis promises ways to approach sexuality from the unconscious; it promises us inhabiting a sociality consisting not of sovereign subjects engaging in wilful acts of copulation but fragmented subjects cruising a world of anonymous objects.

Thānvī’s assertion that “usually it is not possible to attain pleasure without it being personal and embodied” denied the possibility of embodying queer desire on impersonal terrains. He maintained the importance of honoring Muslim juridical-moral normativity when he said further that such a “seeking beyond” was impermissible. In the spirit of Muslim legality and eschatology, Thānvī advised his disciples to restrict their intersubjective desires to personal objects so that they can become felicitous in a world-to-come wherein they will find true the promise of unlimited pleasure. By mitigating the

⁴⁸ Tim Dean, *Beyond Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 274.

queer potential of impersonal desire and asking his disciple to limit his desire to the wife and “the slave-girl,” Thānvī reinscribed heteronormative forms of desire.

When the disciple asked Thānvī about the permissibility of inventing impersonal objects of desire, Thānvī cited a Qur’ānic proof-text that seemingly prohibited such inventions by calling them “transgressions.” These inventions were impermissible, he explained, because they were “neither [images] of one’s wife nor of one’s slave-girl.” I quote the Qur’ānic passage in full to show the scriptural mandate to regulate sexual desire:

Certainly the believers have been successful:
They are those who are humbly submissive in their prayer,
and those who turn away from ill speech,
and those who are observant of alms-giving,
and those who guard their private parts,
except from their wives or the slave-girls their right hands possess, for
indeed, they will not be blamed.
But whoever seeks beyond that, then those are the transgressors. (Qur’ān
23:1-7)

In these seven verses of the Qur’ānic chapter titled “The Believers,” the believing subject was assumed to be male, the marks of whose success were humility in prayer, refrain from ill-speech, charity, and guarding of “private parts.” This verse, however, presented only a part of the picture. Other Qur’ānic verses were strikingly more egalitarian in terms of juxtaposing both genders in the world of morality and religious embodiment. Nonetheless, in the above verses, the Qur’ān mentioned two exceptions with reference to masculine sexual privilege: the wife and the slave-girl. For Thānvī, the believing subject would transgress the divine norms if he sought any means of pleasure beyond these licit objects. Thānvī’s disciple wrote anxiously to avoid this transgression; he wanted to know if conjuring up images not of persons but of objects for self-pleasuring was within the

limits of the licit. Thānvī answered in the negative, explaining that such impersonal images would not be of female subjects designated by the law for the pleasure of the husband. In this case, we see how patriarchal Muslim legal codes provided the context for the production and circulation of psychosexual anxiety. More importantly, this correspondence documented an erotic triangle between Thānvī, his male disciple, and several figurations of the feminine (the dead wife, the living divorcee, and the slave-girl). Sedgwick's triangular conception of male homosocial desire (where homosocial desire emerged between two men in relation to a woman) helps us explain how Thānvī negotiated the desires of other men with reference to figurations of the feminine.

The Beardless Simulacrum

But what about Thānvī's desire? Thānvī spoke of his fear of being alone with a beardless young lad (often a simulacrum for the feminine). Thānvī reportedly said: "I have instructed my disciples not to send a young lad into my scriptorium when I am alone, for I do not trust my self (*nafs*). The result of this is that now everyone in my ṣūfī hospice abstains from [gazing at] young lads."⁴⁹ The figure of the young lad (*amrad*) as an object of older men's desire was not unique to Thānvī's Muslim traditionalist context in British India. The beardless lad was a widespread figure of homoeroticism and connoted notions of beauty and desirability in pre-modern and modern Islamicate contexts.⁵⁰ This figure was especially visible in Arabic prose and poetry.⁵¹ The beardless

⁴⁹ Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Al-'Ilm wa'l-'ulamā'*, ed. Muḥammad Zayd Mazāharī Nadvī (Hatwara, India: Idāra-yi Ta'lifāt-i Ashrafiyya, 1990), 139.

⁵⁰ For an excellent discussion of the pre-modern culture of pederasty in Islamicate settings, see Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 13-51. For a discussion of young men as objects of desire for older men in modern Iran (especially the 19th century), see Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without*

lad was obviously an object of desire that troubled Thānvī's piety. Thānvī invoked a notion of split subjectivity through which he disciplined his self. There was an "I" that announced a lack of trust in relation to "my self." Moreover, this passage suggested that for Thānvī, the regulation of norms happened within notions of community. "I have instructed my disciples not to send a young lad into my scriptorium," he said, acknowledging that he needed others to help him embody certain norms of sexual behavior, namely abstaining from pleasure-yielding gazes at young lads. Apart from confirming the notions of split subjectivity and community as assumptive logics of everyday life for Thānvī, this statement also raised questions about how Thānvī understood and dealt with anxieties around sexual desire and sexual difference.

Thānvī articulated the above statement in a pedagogical context. In ṣūfī gatherings, description was often not the only rhetorical aim of such statements. Through statements of this type, Thānvī might have emphasized chastity to his disciples. It is crucial to note that this statement did not shy away from a pre-emptive *guilt* complex, a psychic formation that resists any definite reading. Feelings of guilt do not necessarily presuppose the presence of a "crime." Guilt by nature is ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations, as Judith Butler elucidates the Freudian position, "guilt can be related to a wish or a fantasy, even grounded in a confusion about where the line is drawn between wish and deed."⁵² If we are to read Thānvī's statement as admmissive of a certain sense of guilt, then we cannot reach any exact conclusion about his sexual object choice.

Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 2005), 11-60.

⁵¹ See the edited volume, J. W. Wright, Jr. and Everett K. Rowson, eds., *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

⁵² Judith Butler, "Rethinking Sexual Differences and Kinship in Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*," *differences* 23, no.2 (2012), 6.

Nonetheless, this statement's invocation of a guilt complex does testify to the presence of a spectral desire that troubled Thānvī. As Butler says, "Guilt may be no more than a sign of anxiety over unacted desire and its ambiguities."⁵³

In another statement, Thānvī shed more light on the figure of the beardless lad and the beautiful woman. He addressed these two objects of desire in terms of visual and sonic pleasure: "It is indecent to hear melodious notes sung by a woman who is not one's kin or by young lads who incite desire in one."⁵⁴ We also read of the perceived danger from the faces of beardless men whose presence disrupts the heterosexual management of desire. Thānvī cited the example of the famed Muslim jurist Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767), one of the founders of Sunnī legal hermeneutics. Supposedly, Abū Ḥanīfa instructed one of his young students, namely Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī (d. 805), to sit behind him, away from his immediate field of vision, so that Abū Ḥanīfa could avoid seeing Shaybānī's beardless face. After narrating this didactic vignette to his disciples, Thānvī asked them rhetorically: "If the grand Imām Abū Ḥanīfa exercised such great caution, then who today can continue to trust himself [in refraining from the pleasure derived from gazing at young men]?"⁵⁵ The beardless faces of lads were most likely perceived as threatening because they introduced into the visual spectacle of Muslim piety the ambiguous sign of desire. The beardless face of a young man was troubling because it invited the gaze away from the adoration of the divine to the idolization of the human. But such beardless faces were also troubling because of their close association with the feminine countenance. The beardless face was a simulacrum, a copy whose indecisive

⁵³ Butler, "Rethinking Sexual Differences," 6.

⁵⁴ Thānvī, *al-'Ilm wa'l-'ulamā'*, 140.

⁵⁵ Thānvī, *al-'Ilm wa'l-'ulamā'*, 139.

resemblance to its original disrupted any straight identification with the gender of the sexual object choice. Through his insistence on repressing the visual and auditory presence of young men who resembled women, Thānvī helped to foster a space in which the queer potential of sexual difference was foreclosed in order to stabilize heteronormative sexuality based on the sexed body. Perhaps Thānvī felt a sense of distrust with himself at the sight of beardless men because their presence disrupted the self-regulation of his heterosexual desire.

On my reading, the above statements do not reveal Thānvī's sexual preferences. What they do reveal, however, is how the specter of femininity haunted the homosocial space inhabited by orthodox Muslims. The symptomatic haunting of femininity resulted in the disavowal of the bodies of those men whose beardless faces came close to resembling those of women. Statements such as these affirm that ghosts of various sorts, whether the ghost of same-sex desire in homosocial spaces or the specter of femininity, haunt patriarchal spaces that operate with the assumptive logic of the separation and suppression of sexual difference. Moreover, this close association between the faces of beardless men and those of women provides one example of how Thānvī imagined the feminine from the standpoint of the masculine. Any face that lacked traits of masculinity, such as the beard, was posited as feminine. These statements illustrate that Thānvī was aware of the disrupting potentials of queer desire, even though he sublimated this desire onto higher moral objectives.

Conclusion

Sublimated desire for the divine was a promising psychic complex and interpretive schema for traditionalists such as Thānvī. In his world, queer desire—those

hard-to-name impulses of love and longing that challenge the containment of affect and attachment—was sacrificed and channelled into tributaries leading to God. The moral subject had to overcome the inclination toward material beauty inscribed within the sensorium, especially the visual apparatus. Thānvī elaborated on the latter apparatus in a 1904 sermon titled, *Al-Tahzīb (Civilized Society)*:

People erroneously assume that gazing at illicit objects is a minor sin. This is in fact a heavy sin, especially when you consider its consequences. It might be a small thing, just like the small hairspring in modern clocks. Although small in size the hairspring ensures order and balance in the clock. Likewise, the rays of light in your eyes, which are even thinner than the hairspring, control your sovereign organ: the heart on which depends your body's movements and internal coherence. The sight is the root of all spiritual ailments. People take its transgressions lightly and have become accustomed to staring and gazing at anything and anyone they please. The root cause of fornication and sodomy is this habituated visual gaze.⁵⁶

Thānvī's position on the primacy of the visual faculty echoed Sirhindī's teaching (discussed earlier in this chapter). For both luminaries, nothing affected the human heart more than images. Thānvī then posed a possible objection to this narrative: if fornication and sodomy first began as visual pleasures, then how does one explain the fornication and sodomy of blind men? Thānvī illuminated his audience: "Blind men, too, fall into fornication and sodomy by means of visual pleasure. They listen to a voice and imagine its speaker to be a handsome lad or a beautiful woman. They imagine the image in their hearts."⁵⁷ Thānvī then explained that Muslim moral law only held one responsible for regulating one's gaze after the first look. For it was irrational and impractical to prohibit the first look as well.

⁵⁶ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 18:518.

⁵⁷ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 18:518.

The first look was the sudden, unexpected glance at beauty. This licit gaze served an important purpose: it introduced one to reflections of divine beauty. Once a person understood that someone's beautiful face only mirrored God's unbounded beauty, they would not need to glance a second time. The second glance was prohibited because it detracted one from getting to the source of beauty, namely the divine being. Thānvī explained this point using an analogy: "Everything other than God is temporary and transitory. All things reflect the divine being; the attributes of all things reflect the divine attributes. The beauty of these things is nothing compared to the beauty of the divine being. Consider, for example, how the sun illuminates a wall so that it becomes radiant and luminous. Only a stupid man can fall in love with the wall instead of the sun! He should know that this radiance does not belong to the wall; it merely reflects the sun's radiance, which will depart as the sun moves beyond the horizon."⁵⁸ Rational people, argued Thānvī, do not fall for reflections of beauty (*ḥusn-i majāzī*) but long for beauty itself (*ḥusn-i ḥaqīqī*).

Thānvī exhorted his disciples and Muslims in general to avoid visual pleasure (gazing at beardless lads) and sonic pleasure (listening to enchanting females). While young lads and beautiful women were dubbed objects of pleasure, the young lad's face was deemed problematic precisely because it resembled the feminine countenance. Both were expressions of beauty and invited the spectator to indulge in sensual objects. Orthodoxy circumvented this indulgence by identifying these beautiful faces and voices as temporary approximations of beauty. God alone possessed real beauty (*jamāl*) and thus God alone should become the object of love and longing.

⁵⁸ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 18:521.

The above theoretical readings of the private exchanges between a traditionalist Muslim ṣūfī-theologian and his disciples have been pursued not without translational anxiety. Yet this anxiety is productive if it helps us navigate the ambiguity and indecisiveness of sexual desire in the archives of South Asian Muslim orthodoxy. Situating queer theory and Islamic studies within a single frame of any sort is not uncomplicated. Matters are especially difficult because of the spatio-temporal multiplicity implied by “Islamicate” and the multiple binarizations around which “sexualities” revolve, including essence/construct, identity/act, homo/hetero, and personal/impersonal. The vestibular nerves that travel into the intersection of Islamic studies and queer theory convey senses of archival excitement and terror.

While the scope of my object of study limits the conclusions I can make about the vast disciplinary formations of queer theory and Islamic studies, the experimental set of readings showcased in this chapter illustrate that there are passages and practices within Islamicate archives that are susceptible to queer theoretical readings. I used various strands of queer theory throughout this chapter in order to explore the themes of desire and sublimation within Thānvī’s archive. These explorations demonstrate that orthodoxy’s species of desire and technologies of the self cannot be understood without recourse to sexual difference. The next chapter thus interrogates femininity and masculinity in South Asian Muslim orthodoxy.

Chapter 5. The Drama of Domesticity: Ornamental Femininity and Essential Masculinity

The previous chapter demonstrated how desire and sublimation in South Asian Muslim orthodoxy were intimately linked with sexual difference. The feminine and the masculine bled into each other: the beardless boy's face was seen as beautiful because it resembled the feminine countenance. In this chapter, I explore the construction of femininity and masculinity in South Asian Muslim orthodox discourses. I do so by entering into the scene of domesticity and concentrate on the politics of sexual difference and religious reform in colonial India. The following analysis of Thānvī's extensive teaching on domesticity reveals how seemingly insular intellectual debates among Muslims on sexual difference were situated within broader social and political frameworks.

Before Thānvī, South Asian orthodox Muslim theologians rarely assumed a female readership in their texts. Thānvī directly addressed Muslim women in some of his sermons and writings, especially in his legal compendium, *Bihishtī zewar* (*Heavenly Ornaments*).¹ Originally published around 1900, this book continues to inform and shape the lives of many contemporary Sunnī women (and men) in South Asian and abroad. *Heavenly Ornaments* provides formulaic knowledge about Sunnī doctrines and Ḥanafī sacred law (*fiqh*). The text includes long legal expositions of rituals, such as the daily prayer, and social institutions, such as marriage. The book enjoyed pervasive popularity

¹ Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Bihishtī zewar mudallal wa mukammal* (Karachi: Dār al-Isha'āt, 1981). For a partial English translation, see, Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf 'Alī Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1990). In this dissertation, I refer to this seminal text as *Heavenly Ornaments* in the body of the dissertation, but as *Bihishti zewar* in the footnotes. The translations are mine.

within Thānvī's lifetime, reports the Urdu literary critic C.M. Naim, and many Muslim brides "entered their husband's home with the Holy Qur'an in one hand and the *Bihishti zewar* [*Heavenly Ornaments*] in the other."²

In her ethnography conducted from 2004 to 2006 in Leicester, England, Raana Bokhari shows the continuing significance of *Heavenly Ornaments* in a Western city located thousands of miles away from the Indian "home" of this revivalist text.³ Bokhari analyzes Gujarati Muslim women in Leicester who inherit Thānvī's legacy in multiple ways, ranging from identification to disidentification with his moral counsels. Since its initial publication, Thānvī's *Heavenly Ornaments* has been a household relic in countless South Asian domestic spaces. While I analyze *Heavenly Ornaments* to show Thānvī's essentialist and patriarchal assumptions about gender and domesticity, I also underscore the importance of looking beyond this text to Thānvī's other treatises and lectures wherein questions of sexual difference feature prominently. This is especially true of his 1931 legal treatise titled *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājizat li'l-ḥalīlat al-ʿājizah* (*The Successful Stratagem for the Helpless Wife*), which I examine in the next chapter.⁴

Thānvī's writings and statements reveal that he conceived of gender relations and roles within the conceptual structures of Sunnī legalism. Thānvī and like-minded clerical authorities emphasized doctrinal and spiritual formation, but they accentuated these elements of subjectivity within legal frameworks. In fact, they taught that everyday salvation practices, from the daily prayer to bodily purification rituals, manifested and

² Quoted in Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 3.

³ Raana Bokhari, "Bihishti Zewar: A Text for Respectable Women?" In *Reading Spiritualities: Constructing and Representing the Sacred*. Eds. Dawn Llewellyn and Deborah F. Sawyer (Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT.: Ashgate, 2008): 135-151.

⁴ Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājizat li'l-ḥalīlat al-ʿājizah ya 'nī awrataun kā ḥaqq-i tansīkh-i nikāḥ* (Karachi: Dār al-Isha'āt, 1987).

strengthened one's doctrinal and spiritual formation. This is why *Heavenly Ornaments* is primarily a manual of Islamic legal ethics (*fiqh*), even though Thānvī decorated this text with advice on handwriting, cooking, and rearing children. For him, women's embodiment of *fiqh* was especially important, for he considered women to be crucial transmitters of his legal tradition to future generations of Muslim men and women. Thānvī's ideal woman personified legal and moral minutiae in her everyday routine and character. How might we interpret such scholars' fixation on women and their hyper-reliance on the feminine as both the container and the transmitter of received moral values?

In this chapter, I discuss how the figure of woman mediated the anxieties of male Muslim intellectuals about changing social hierarchies in a colonial setting. The "respectable" woman made frequent appearances in the discourses of male intellectuals as an allegory of social dignity and communal conscience. This allegorical rendering of the ideal female subject was a common trope in the discourses of Deobandī theologians, but also in the writings of other social actors within *sharīf* culture (lit. "respectable culture," which referred to the mode of sociality associated with upper middle-class Muslims in colonial North India who claimed to be descendants of foreign Muslim settlers from Arabo-Persianite parts of the Muslim world).

While I agree with Barbara Metcalf, Gail Minault, and Faisal Devji that reformist and revivalist educational projects and publications for women consolidated *sharīf* culture, I depart from this reading by insisting that we take seriously how the theologians (*ulamā'*) had developed into a distinct subculture in colonial modernity (a subculture

that was no longer reducible to *sharīf* culture).⁵ The members of this distinct subculture spoke the dialect of legalism, from which they derived their discursive and communal authority. I therefore argue that for orthodox '*ulamā*', the woman question was closely related to the social hierarchy authorized by legalism. Borrowing from the German-American political theorist Hannah Arendt, I discuss the conceptual implications of authoritarianism. I use Arendt's insight in order to show how authoritarianism in its legalist guises naturalized gender inequality. Thus, for orthodox '*ulamā*', domesticity and gender matters were conceptually and socially structured within the framework of Sunnī legalism. In the next chapter we analyze the role of the colonial state in sanctioning orthodox legalism, precisely how colonial power facilitated the re-inscription of the Muslim woman as a fractured subject of this discourse. This chapter provides the historical background needed to understand the coalescing of Muslim orthodoxy and colonial modernity over the discursive terrain of gender.

Muslim Women and Colonial Modernity

After the Revolt of 1857, orthodox Muslim intellectuals found themselves defending their normative teachings on women's private and public status. Muslim women who had been brought up in orthodox Muslim settings followed particular protocols of everyday behavior, which emphasized chastity, dignity, and respectability. For example, the wife of Muḥammad Qāsim Nānōtvī (1831-1880), one of the founders of the Deoband seminary, is described as "obedient" (*tābi'-dār*) and "generous" (*sakhī*) in

⁵ Faisal Devji, "Muslim Nationalism: Founding Identity in Colonial India." Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Chicago. 1993; Faisal Devji, "Gender and the Politics of Space: The Movement for Women's Reform in Muslim India, 1857-1900." *South Asia* 14.1 (1991): 141-153.

managing the affairs of her household and providing for her husband's guests.⁶ Such depictions of Muslim women appeared in the writings of orthodox male intellectuals of the twentieth century as well. For instance, the influential pan-Islamic Indian revivalist and intellectual magnate Abū'l-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadvī (1914-1999) eulogized his sister in his three-volume miscellany of biographies titled *Purāney chirāgh* (*Lasting Lamps*). In this eulogy, he described her chaste qualities, but also her bibliophilic proclivities and her intellectual curiosity. For Nadvī, all members of his household were engrossed in intellectual production, including his sisters: "My two sisters were restless until they got hold of a new book to read."⁷ Muslim women in such domestic spaces were therefore afforded intellectual opportunities, but they were also bound to appreciate and embody ideals of chastity and respectability that were defined largely from masculinist perspectives.

While Thānvī was innovative in writing for women, he was hardly alone in writing about women in the British Indian context. Other Sunni luminaries also treated similar topics in their scholarly tracts. For example, the Indian Ḥadīth scholar Muḥammad Shams al-Ḥaqq 'Azīmabādī (1857-1911) argued that the Prophet Muḥammad's sayings warrant the permissibility of teaching writing to women.⁸ Outside of the specialized discourses of the 'ulamā', the Urdu novels of Nazīr Aḥmad (1836-1912), especially *Taubat al-naṣūḥ* (*The Repentance of Nussooh*) and *Mira'āt al-'arūs*

⁶ See Muḥammad Ya'qūb Nānautvī, *Savāniḥ 'umrī* in Manāẓir Aḥsan Gīlānī, *Savāniḥ-i Qāsimī* (Lahore: Maktaba-i Raḥmāniyya, 1980), 1:32.

⁷ Abū'l-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadvī, *Purāney chirāgh*, 2:343.

⁸ See, Muḥammad Shams al-Ḥaqq 'Azīmabādī, *Uqūd al-jumān fī jawāz ta'līm al-kitāba li'l-niswān* (*Necklace of Pearls: The Permissibility of Teaching Writing to Women*) (Karachi: Mu'assasat al-Majma' al-'Ilmī, 1988). For a brief discussion of this text, see Asma Sayeed, "Muslim Women's Religious Education in Early and Classical Islam." *Religion Compass* 5/3 (2011): 94-103.

(*The Bride's Mirror*), had given textual space to women's voices and experiences, only to reinscribe their female characters within *sharīf* domesticity.⁹ The Urdu poet Alṭāf Ḥussain Ḥālī (1837-1914) had composed the didactic digest, *Majālis al-nisā* (*The Assemblies of Women*), to encourage women's education.¹⁰ The reformist thinker Sayyid Mumtāz 'Alī (1860-1935) addressed similar issues in his treatise, *Huqūq al-niswān* (*The Rights of Women*).¹¹ This body of literature appeared between the late 1860s to the turn-of-the-century. This period witnessed the intensification of print materials addressing Muslim women's rights, especially the right to seek education.

Muslim reformers encouraged laypersons to abandon popular customs, some of which they condemned as "un-Islamic." The reformers argued that abandoning such local mores could alleviate the visible injustices suffered by women. If their proposed solutions were followed, they argued, then the British would have no reason to castigate local practices. The revivalist scholars articulated Islam in an idiom of authentic religious identity, and therefore condemned any social convention that blurred the distinction between Hindu and Muslim. The discourses on women's rights in colonial India were related to specific political concerns and movements, the formations and contestations of "religion," "tradition," and "modernity," and the changing face of social life due to print media and modern modes of literacy.¹² Barbara D. Metcalf uses the word, "anxiety," to

⁹ See, Nazīr Aḥmad, *The Bride's Mirror*, trans. G.E. Ward (London: Oxford University Press, 1899); *The Repentance of Nussooh*, trans. M. Kempson (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004).

¹⁰ Alṭāf Ḥussain Ḥālī, *Majālis al-nisā* (New Delhi: Maktaba-i Jami'a, 1971); Khwaja Altaf Hussain Hali, *Voices of Silence: English Translation of Khwaja Altaf Hussain Hali's Majalis un-Nisaa and Chup ki Dad*, trans. Gail Minault (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1986).

¹¹ See Gail Minault, "Sayyid Mumtaz Ali and 'Huquq un-Niswan': An Advocate of Women's Rights in Islam in the Late Nineteenth Century." *Modern Asian Studies* 24.1 (1990): 147-172.

¹² Barbara D. Metcalf, "Reading and Writing about Muslim Women." In *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 101.

characterize the desire of the ‘*ulamā*’ to “include women in normative standards.”¹³ A desire becomes anxious when its fulfillment remains ambiguous, but also when it reveals something troubling about our own complicity in our objects of criticism, as Metcalf says, “In challenging women’s regional practices...the reformers were confronting what was presumably part of the fabric of their own everyday lives.”¹⁴

For Gail Minault, Muslim intellectual elites of this time period intensified the discourse on woman because of fundamental changes in their sociality, which was transforming from aristocratic privilege to middle-class opportunism. As Minault explains, “Men of this generation, whether western-educated or ‘*ulama*, were seeking the ideal woman to meet their own needs and that of their class and community—women who would be better wives and mothers, and better Muslims.”¹⁵ Such idealization of women served as an apparatus to regulate their lives and reduce their social role to domesticity. In this regard, Thānvī’s emphasis on individual piety was located within broader social changes of British India wherein “an aristocratic culture based on birth was gradually being displaced by a middle-class culture based on individual achievement.”¹⁶

While Thānvī’s *Heavenly Ornaments* reinforced similar themes and posited ritual piety as the means to cultivate “respectability” and salvation, his treatise, *The Successful Stratagem for the Helpless Wife*, posited legalism as the guarantor of women’s limited agency and social security. Thānvī’s archives reveal his sustained engagement with

¹³ Metcalf, “Reading and Writing about Muslim Women.” 104.

¹⁴ Metcalf, “Reading and Writing about Muslim Women.” 104.

¹⁵ Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 62.

¹⁶ Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 70.

heated colonial contestations over the meaning of femininity and masculinity. He insisted on the necessary link between moral formation and gender categories.

For theologians such as Thānvī, British rule was destined to change Muslims' everyday lives, affecting especially the norms governing the traditional household. Social organization, explained these theologians, ought to mirror the natural laws of the divine order.¹⁷ For them, the natural difference between the sexes translated into social differences of visibility, mobility, commercial transactions, and political participation. The advent of colonial modernity disrupted such traditionalist life-worlds, and Muslim theologians rearticulated their theological and legal positions with reference to the difference between the sexes. While colonial modernity posed challenges to such theological and legal imaginations—and while revivalist traditionalism rushed to rescue the waning order of things—for both sides the woman question was largely a rhetorical ruse to contest cultural differences.

Colonial powers used—and abused—feminism in order to denigrate local cultures. Colonialist discourse paid lip service to the Enlightenment ideas of gender equality. Yet we should distinguish Enlightenment thinking about women's equality, especially as articulated by philosophers such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1757-1797), from the uses and abuses of feminism by colonial powers.¹⁸ In different phases of the British colonizing-cum-civilizing mission, colonial administrators employed feminism against native men and *their* cultures. As Partha Chatterjee notes, "By assuming a position of sympathy with the unfree and oppressed womanhood of India, the colonial mind was able

¹⁷ Kelly Pemberton also points this out in her essay, "Gender," in Jamal Elias, *Key Themes for the Study of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010): 141-160.

¹⁸ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1996).

to transform this figure of the Indian woman into a sign of the inherently oppressive and unfree nature of the entire cultural tradition of a country.”¹⁹ In condemning native cultures for their bad treatment of women, colonial authorities assumed as if women were outside of these cultures, erasing the entrenched role of women’s participation in the historical construction of local cultures.

While colonial officials held Islam and Hinduism to be contemptible civilizations because of their alleged gender inequality, their legal and social policies resonated with the regressive Victorian idea of a femininity bound to domesticity.²⁰ The colonialist deployment of the woman question to disenfranchise the thought-systems and practices of native populations compelled some local intellectuals to defend, but also to reform, their positions.²¹ Thus, the colonialist rhetoric of women’s oppression informed the discursive practices of various local actors, including those who wanted to apologize for their traditions and those who wanted to reform social norms and established customs. It was often the case that the perceived need for apologetics merged with the desire for social reform in the efforts of many local authors. Within the various structures of late nineteenth and early twentieth century religious reform, intellectual actors of various ideological persuasions debated the woman question in an emergent public sphere.

The reform efforts of local intellectuals, including Muslim theologians, went hand-in-hand with colonialist management of bodies public and private. British

¹⁹ Partha Chatterjee, “Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India.” *American Ethnologist* 16.4 (November 1989): 622-633. 622.

²⁰ Leila Ahmed, among others, observes how colonial powers used feminism to delegitimize native culture. In particular, the British used “Victorian womanhood...as the ideal and measure of civilization” (*Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992], 151).

²¹ The debate on Sati exemplifies this with reference to the colonialist critique of native Hindu practices. See, for example, Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998).

administrators secured the reach of colonial governmentality by granting local religious authorities the license to adjudicate matters of personal and domestic life.²² The first governor-general of British India, Warren Hastings, called for the application of Muslim and Hindu law—or the “Koran” and the “Brahminic Shasters”—to problems of everyday life, including “inheritance, marriage, caste...” In this way, the Hastings Plan of 1772 interpellated Muslim and Hindu clerical authorities (*maulavis* and *pandits*, respectively), as the micro-managers of spheres outside of officialdom. From the late eighteenth century to the 1860s, colonial courts relied on Muslim and Hindu clergy to resolve disputes and legal cases pertaining to personal law. In this way, colonialist discourse consolidated the religious authority of dominantly masculinist clerical institutions.²³

In this context, the household—and issues involving domestic life, marriage, reproduction, and so on—became the last stronghold of the religious authority of male traditionalists, Hindus and Muslims alike. Muslim male authorities from this time period therefore assumed the position of authority sanctioned by their discursive traditions *and* colonial governmentality. Clerical involvement was replaced later by translations of

²² See Janaki Nair, *Women and Law in Colonial India: A Social History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women in collaboration with the National Law School of India University, 1996); Rachel Lara Sturman, *The Government of Social Life in Colonial India: Liberalism, Religious Law, and Women's Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Flavia Agnes, *Law and Gender Inequality: The Politics of Women's Rights in India* (New Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²³ See, Michael R. Anderson, “Islamic Law and the Colonial Encounter in British India.” In *Islamic Family Law*, eds. Chibli Mallat and Jane Connors (London: Graham and Trotman, 1990): 205-223. As Anderson points out, “Systems of personal law served to consolidate the authority of certain community groups, and thus incorporate community-based forms of surplus extraction into the colonial state. The position of the landed-gentry rested on pre-colonial patterns of family organization. As much as it rankled the sensibilities of Macaulay and others who sought a uniform legal code, Anglo-Muhammadan law conserved and even strengthened aspects of community organization on which colonial rule rested” (“Islamic Law and the Colonial Encounter in British India, 208).

classical and medieval legal texts, which were taken as indices of a fixed law.²⁴ At times, the British also trusted the customary traditions of the natives.²⁵ By the 1890s when Thānvī started writing profusely, the British had stopped relying entirely on the advice of Muslim clergy. In this context, Thānvī re-inserted the importance of the ‘*ulamā*’ for the public and private life of Muslims. His famous writings on the woman question, as well as his many lectures on this topic, exemplify the orthodox desire to regain social capital, especially in the arena of domesticity. As will become clear in my detailed discussion of *The Successful Stratagem for the Helpless Wife*, Thānvī was efficacious in reinscribing the ‘*ulamā*’ within the structures of colonial power.

Muslim men’s preoccupation with women’s emancipation or subjugation occurred in other colonial contexts as well. In Egypt, for example, colonial modernity shaped heavily the debates on women’s public and private lives. As Leila Ahmed notes, “In Egypt the British colonial presence and discursive input constituted critical components in the situation that witnessed the emergence of the new discourse of the veil.”²⁶ The Egyptian reformers al-Taḥṭāwī (1801-1873) and Muḥammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905) were supporters of women’s education and urged changes in personal law. The controversial writings of Qāsim Amīn (1863-1908), especially his *Tahrīr al-mar’a* (*Liberation of Woman*), mobilized European discourses of liberation and freedom to

²⁴ For a detailed account of how Anglo-Muhammadian jurisprudence stagnated Islamic law, see Scott Kugle, “Framed, Blamed and Renamed: The Recasting of Islamic Jurisprudence in Colonial South Asia.” *Modern Asian Studies* 35.2 (2001): 257-313.

²⁵ See, for example, Michael R. Anderson, “Islamic Law and the Colonial Encounter in British India.” In *Islamic Family Law*, eds. Chibli Mallat and Jane Connors (London: Graham and Trotman, 1990): 205-223.

²⁶ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 145.

encourage changes in women's social and domestic lives.²⁷ In particular, Amin used the unveiling of women's faces as an allegory for structural social change, hardly noting that such reformist discourses also served British colonizing mandates. In response to Amin, several reactionary scholars affirmed Amin's stereotypical views of Arab and Muslim societies, even in their attempts to defend women's humane treatment in Islamic sources.²⁸ Throughout colonial modernity, the figure of woman, especially the Muslim woman, served as an intense discursive territory to negotiate the discrepancy of power between the colonizer and the colonized.

Thānvī on Domesticity

If it were not for Thānvī's writings on Muslim women, he would have been entirely absent from Fazlur Rahman's *Islam and Modernity: Transformations of an Intellectual Tradition*.²⁹ As one of the chief architects of Sunnī orthodoxy in colonial South Asia, Thānvī enters Rahman's grand narrative of modern intellectual traditions of Islam under the sign, "woman." Thanks to *Heavenly Ornaments*, we find references to Thānvī in the scholarly literature on South Asian Islam and South Asian women's studies. *Heavenly Ornaments* reveals Thānvī's reformist teachings and attitudes on women, providing us insight into early twentieth-century traditionalist Muslim

²⁷ See, Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women and The New Woman: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism*, trans. Samiha Sidhom Peterson (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000).

²⁸ A case in point is the following work by an Egyptian nationalist scholar: Muḥammad Ṭal'at Ḥarb, *Tarbiyat al-Mar'a wa'l-ḥijāb* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Taraqqī, 1899).

²⁹ Fazlur Rahman writes, "In the late nineteenth century Ashraf 'Ali Thanavi (d. 1942), a scholar from Deoband seminary, wrote an encyclopedic work for women called *Bihishti zewar* (*Jewelry of Paradise*), which gave exhaustive instruction on traditional lines, not only on Islamic subjects but on cookery and hygiene. This voluminous work, to which the author continued to make additions and which has passed through scores of editions, was customarily given by parents as part of her dowry to every bride who could read, and in the traditionalist circles the practice still continues" (*Islam and Modernity: Transformations of an Intellectual Tradition* [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982], 76-7).

assumptions about femininity and masculinity. Although *Heavenly Ornaments* is his most well known text, he also wrote and spoke about gender and domesticity in other parts of his extensive oeuvre. He authored an apologetic text on the Prophet Muḥammad's practice of polygamy titled *Kathrat al-azwāj li-ṣāhib al-mi'rāj* (*The Polygamy of the Prophet of Heavenly Ascent*).³⁰ He addressed the legal provisions within the Ḥanafī School for women's right to divorce in *The Successful Stratagem for the Helpless Wife*. This body of work archives Muslim orthodoxy's various operative assumptions about femininity, masculinity, and domesticity in early twentieth-century Indo-Muslim culture.

Orthodox theologians such as Thānvī upheld the difference between the sexes to be natural and ontological (as opposed to cultural and ontic). Moreover, for them this ontological difference entailed social and political differences between men and women in their ordinary lives. Nānōtvī discussed the ontological differences between the sexes in the context of inter-religious polemics in his book, *Intiṣār al-Islām* (*The Triumph of Islam*).³¹ Why do Muslim traditions about paradise promise seventy female maidens for believing men but a single husband for believing women?³² Hindu reformers had posed

³⁰ Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Kathrat al-azwāj li-ṣāhib al-mi'rāj* (Lahore: Abdullah Academy, 1995). Thānvī wrote this text in the context of inter-religious polemics in colonial South Asia, where Christian missionaries and Hindu proselytizers alike questioned Muḥammad's polygamy. We learn from Thānvī's text that in September 1929, the Urdu Newspaper, *Muhājir*, published an apologetic essay on the Prophet's wives. Thānvī made this essay the basis of his book, first recording it in its entirety and then supplementing this media source with 101 traditions narrated by the Prophet's wife, 'Ā'ishah. In salvaging this article, Thānvī also salvaged its modernist prose, specifically its reference to the public and the private as a useful binary to think about the Prophet's legacy and teaching. According to the article, the Prophet's message could be divided into two types: a public message and a private message. While the Prophet's male companions transmitted his public message, his wives had the honor of transmitting his private message. What Thānvī added to this modernist rendering is noteworthy. He insisted that in order for him to defend the Prophet's polygamy, he chose to remain silent mostly and let the Prophet's wives speak for themselves. He therefore quoted extensively from 'Ā'ishah, providing a few remarks here and there, but giving voice in his narrative to a female authority of early Islam.

³¹ Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī, *Intiṣār al-Islām*, ed. Ishtiyāq Aḥmad (Deoband: Dār al-'Ulūm Deoband, 1967).

³² Nānautvī, *Intiṣār al-Islām*, 67-69.

this question to Nānautvī, pressing him to confront gender inequality in Islam’s sacred sources. Nānautvī used an agronomic analogy and a monarchic analogy to reply to this objection against his religion. We explain both of these analogies, as they were central to how Thānvī imagined sexual difference.

Framing reproductive femininity in agronomic terms, Nānautvī wrote, “A woman is to her child as earth is to crop production.”³³ Nānautvī’s analogy revealed a patriarchal imagination that equated the feminine body with the maternal body. He viewed this body and its product, the child, as the subjects/sites of human reproduction, but viewed man as the agent of reproduction. According to this logic, each man possessed his own piece of land to till. Letting two or more men till the same land could engender violence between men: “If a woman is divided up between several men, who all could have sexual intercourse with her simultaneously in accordance with marriage rights, then this will be a great source of chaos and enmity [between the competing men].”³⁴ Nānautvī further continued this analogy, pointing out that one man could plough different fields without disturbing “the order of the world” (*niẓām-i ‘ālam*): “When a single man ploughs different fields, he is able to take hold of all produced crops.”³⁵ Nānautvī acknowledged that the agronomic analogy was imperfect, for the earth’s product could be divided up between men, but the mother’s product, the child, could not be cut into pieces and given to multiple fathers. The child’s indivisibility gave Nānautvī the occasion to claim that the rational necessity for purity of lineage justified polygyny but not polyandry.

³³ Nānautvī, *Intiṣār al-Islām*, 69.

³⁴ Nānautvī, *Intiṣār al-Islām*, 69-70.

³⁵ Nānautvī, *Intiṣār al-Islām*, 70.

Nānautvī's second analogy compared the relationship between men and women to that between the sovereign ruler (*ḥākim*) and his or her ruled subject (*maḥkūm*). In typical patriarchal fashion, Nānautvī paralleled men to rulers and women to ruled subjects: "According to Muslim principles (*qawā'id-i ahl-i Islām*), woman is the subject and man is the sovereign."³⁶ To Nānautvī's mind, this was an axiomatic analogy, for "man is the owner of woman," a relationship justified by the monetary value of the dower (*mahr*).³⁷ This monarchic analogy, argued Nānautvī, further corroborated the rationality of polygyny: "While ruled subjects can be many—in fact, a ruler's wealth and respect is proportionate to the number of his subjects—having many rulers is a source of embarrassment."³⁸ Nānautvī then invited his readership to imagine the following scenario, which he depicted with much sarcasm: "Take the case of a polity wherein there are multiple rulers all trying to govern a single subject!"³⁹ He compared this polity to polyandry, urging his readers to see the logic behind polygyny. Yet, the next thing he said clearly betrayed the gender dynamics of his monarchist analogy: "A single Queen Victoria rules over thousands of men. For each of these men, there are not a thousand Victorias!"⁴⁰ This comment unearths the depth of patriarchy in traditionalist Muslim thought, for even the gender of Victoria does not challenge the correspondence between

³⁶ Nānautvī, *Intiṣār al-Islām*, 71.

³⁷ Kecia Ali provides a concise account of *mahr*: "Bodies and sexual rights were not the only things transacted in marriage; money figured too. As in most societies through history, marriage transferred wealth. Dower—*mahr* or *ṣadāq*—was the primary male obligation resulting from marriage...Beyond the social function of dower in marriage, a strong link is established in legal thought between financial compensation and sexual legitimacy, making clear connections between bodily and financial claims" (*Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam* [Cambridge, MASS. and London: Harvard University Press, 2010], 49).

³⁸ Nānautvī, *Intiṣār al-Islām*, 72.

³⁹ Nānautvī, *Intiṣār al-Islām*, 73.

⁴⁰ Nānautvī, *Intiṣār al-Islām*, 73.

masculinity and sovereignty. We will see shortly how Thānvī invoked the same analogy to explain his views on sexual difference.

The figure of woman, for Thānvī, oscillated between an idealized disembodied form and a banal being. As Thānvī suggested, “God created the wife for man’s comfort and peace of mind, for she relieves him of a thousand worries.”⁴¹ According to this perspective, only woman can free man from his existential loneliness and alienation. In this discussion, Thānvī did not address the question of woman’s existence-for-herself, but discussed man’s natural inclination: “The human being is naturally inclined toward friendship and love, and the wife fulfills this need superbly. For the woman possesses a soft body and delicate sensibilities, and she shows utmost responsibility in rearing children and managing the household.”⁴² In Thānvī’s patriarchal imagination, the wife exists for purposes of pleasure and reproduction. Her disciplined management of the household could make family life the cradle of collectivity and civilization: “Marriage [*nikāḥ*] is the root of civilizational ethics [*tamaddun*] and love for nation [*ḥubb al-waṭan*]...as it is an ideal antidote to ward off diseases of sorts. Without this divine norm [marriage], the entire planet would be barren. There would be no abode, no garden, and no sign of any nation.”⁴³ The female body, for Thānvī, served multiple purposes, from fulfilling masculine pleasure to sustaining the species to transmitting ideological attachment to nation and civilization.

In Thānvī’s multivolume collection of correspondence, *Tarbiyat al-sālik* (*Tutelage for the Seeker*), we read of a communication between Thānvī and a disciple

⁴¹ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Al-Maṣāliḥ al-‘aqliyya lil-aḥkām al-naqliyya* (Karachi: Dār al-Ishā‘at, 1977), 136.

⁴² Thānvī, *Al-Maṣāliḥ al-‘aqliyyah*, 136.

⁴³ Thānvī, *Al-Maṣāliḥ al-‘aqliyyah*, 138.

concerning domestic troubles. The disciple wrote, “My revered elder, your strict warnings have proved useful for me. I thank God that [your prescribed] regimen has been quite effective. But now I request your prayers for my wife, as she troubles me much.” Thānvī replied, “I thank God that your laziness is withering away. I also offer prayers for you. Do not worry about your wife troubling you. This is indeed a struggle (*mujāhida*) that yields you reward in the afterlife. Let her trouble you some more.”⁴⁴ Thānvī encouraged his disciples to embody self-discipline, especially in their domestic circumstances. He advised the man to view relationality in terms of “struggle,” suggesting that one can live without instant gratification. In advising his disciple to concentrate on his shortcomings, Thānvī bypassed the pronouncement of any evaluative judgment regarding the man’s wife. Thānvī might have downplayed the wife’s role. Or, perhaps, he took seriously his ignorance about the wife and therefore hesitated to pass any judgment on her character. Both readings are possible. We could speculate further that Thānvī identified with the wife, and read her “troubling” character and behavior against the grain. According to this reading, Thānvī saw the troubling wife—regardless of her *actual* behavior—to be a symptom of the man’s struggle with his lacks and limitations. It could be likely that the man’s complaint about his wife was based on certain male-centered assumptions about gender roles. Perhaps, it was not the wife who troubled the husband, but the husband who could not tolerate another authority figure in the household. Thānvī, then, took the figure of the troubling wife as a symptom of the husband’s mastery complex. As a *ṣūfī* master, he advised the disciple not to worry about the wife, but to limit his unbounded desire for mastery.

⁴⁴ Thānvī, *Tarbiyat al-sālik*, 1: 432.

Thānvī's reformist treatises also offered resourceful perspectives on gender relations. In his 1920 tome, *Islāh-i inqilāb-i ummat (Reforming the Alteration of the Muslim Community)*, Thānvī criticized the prevalent compulsory logic of heterosexual marriage.⁴⁵ For him, men who have no sexual desire for women should forthrightly avoid the marriage contract (*nikāḥ*).⁴⁶ He argued that by following mere custom, these men put themselves and their wives in a lifetime of domestic trouble. Thānvī pointed out that in Islamic law, *nikāḥ* was only compulsory when a man could fulfill his wife's financial and sexual needs. Thānvī also said that marriage was about "the good life," and in instances where the couple is not pursuing the latter ideal there emerges between them "an unfavorable aura" (*nāgawārī*) and "lack of relational harmony" (*nā-ittifāqī*).⁴⁷ He therefore considered immoral for a man who had no need of a wife to hide this aspect of his personality and get married in order to fulfill social mores and customs.

Thānvī also condemned people who married their daughters to impotent or unfit husbands in order to gain material benefits from such marriages.⁴⁸ Worse still, he argued, were those parents who urged their daughters to get married even in the absence of forthcoming material benefits from the *nikāḥ*. For Thānvī, such parents had fallen prey to the erroneous thinking that marriage was the teleological goal of all human life. He wrote, "Such foolish people have forgotten that the purpose (*maqṣad*) of *nikāḥ* is not to provide nourishment to people or to provide companionship."⁴⁹ Moreover, Thānvī said that without complete suitability or chemistry between husband and wife, the couple is

⁴⁵ Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Islāh-i inqilāb-i ummat* (Karachi: Idarat al-Ma'arif, 1998).

⁴⁶ Thānvī, *Islāh-i inqilāb-i ummat*, 2:23.

⁴⁷ Thānvī, *Islāh-i inqilāb-i ummat*, 2:23.

⁴⁸ Thānvī, *Islāh-i inqilāb-i ummat*, 2:24.

⁴⁹ Thānvī, *Islāh-i inqilāb-i ummat*, 2:24.

doomed to experience a miserable life. Likewise, he criticized *sharīf* domestic norms according to which younger women, some barely into their puberty, were married off to men in their late 50s or 60s. For Thānvī, these sorts of arrangements were prone to produce various domestic troubles.⁵⁰

Thānvī's reformist sayings have the potential to revamp our understanding of the patriarchal imagination of South Asian Muslim orthodoxy. These perspectives, whether they were mere rhetorical ruses or actual quotidian realities, reached behind the surface of legal and moral norms to highlight the underlying ideals of these norms. In this way, these concrete perspectives may have seemed more pertinent to the devout Muslim in her everyday environs than the abstract and largely inefficacious rhetoric of egalitarian gender relations voiced by male modernists.

However, these resourceful readings lose persuasive force when we turn to other places within Thānvī's archives. In his 1912 lecture, *The Branches of Faith* (*Shu'ab al-imān*), Thānvī spoke at length about gender equality, using various rhetorical devices to underscore the absurdity of equality between the sexes.⁵¹ In this lecture, he stated unequivocally that men were superior to women. He argued that the divine commandments applied to women via men, comparing women to the ruled (*maḥkūm*) and men to the ruler (*ḥākim*). According to this logic, when a ruler follows a norm, it becomes binding on his subjects by default. This means that by commanding men to perform salvation practices, God had indirectly instructed women to do the same. Thānvī scolded Muslims who admired modern liberal values, pointing out that the British only

⁵⁰ Thānvī, *Islāh-i inqilāb-i ummat*, 2:24.

⁵¹ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6: 209-236.

paid lip service to women's equality without translating such values into everyday practice. Thānvī upheld a hierarchical notion of equality that resonated with a medieval definition of justice (*'adl*), according to which justice entailed the maintenance of something in its proper place. While I explore his understanding of hierarchy in a later section, at this point it suffices to say that in his conceptual imaginary, each organism corresponded to a predetermined comportment, which situated it within a cosmological-cum-social hierarchy. However, Thānvī was rather parsimonious when it came to the distribution of quantitative justice (*qisṭ*) between men and women.

Thānvī was fairly critical of gender egalitarianism, explaining that this idea contradicted the three chief sources of truth: revelation, reason, and sense perception. With reference to sense perception, he provided examples of masculine might and feminine fragility, the high pitch of masculine voice, men's superior capacity to reason, and their firm determination in matters of decision-making and judgment. Moreover, he held that men's superiority over women was a universal truth, which was necessitated by "the demand of the unseen" (*ghaybī taqāzā*) and "natural law" (*fīṭrī qānūn*). He professed, "Even those Europeans who had claimed equality [between men and women] had to finally conclude that women were not fit for certain social positions. Because we find universal agreement (*ijmā'*) on this matter, it is a demand of the unseen and a part of natural law."⁵² These views show that Thānvī was no egalitarian thinker. He translated his androcentric ontological assumptions about sexual difference into legal, moral, and social positions that upheld gender segregation and the subjugation of women. Thānvī taught that sexual difference was essential and not accidental, and for him the truth of

⁵² Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:212.

biological sex could be demonstrated by revelation, reason, and sensation. In such instances of Thānvī's textual corpus, we encounter misogyny face-to-face.

Heavenly Ornaments

Thānvī's prolific writing on women is bound to produce contradictory assessments of sexual difference and the constructions of masculinity and femininity in late colonial Muslim orthodoxy. As mentioned before, his most notorious tract in this regard is *Heavenly Ornaments*. My following analysis of this text shows the multiple dimensions of gender in Muslim orthodox discourses in colonial India. I situate and discuss *Heavenly Ornaments* within the discursive tapestries of *fiqh* and moral formation, social reform and the ideal female subject imagined by male reformers, the rendering of femininity as ornamental, Thānvī's identification-with the feminine, and finally the naturalization of gender asymmetries by recourse to the classical notion of authoritarian hierarchy.

"For some time now, I have been heartsick after each glance upon the devastating ruination of the religion of the women of Hindustān," wrote Thānvī in the introduction of *Heavenly Ornaments*.⁵³ At the outset, Thānvī confessed his affective attachment with women's material and religious conditions. "For some time now" suggests that he has inculcated this attachment for several years, and therefore his writing on women's affairs was not sporadic but based on continued "glances." Moreover, his deep affective investment in this topic was powerful enough to make his heart hurt (*dil dukhta tha*). In the same instance, Thānvī also used the emotionally charged expression, "devastating ruination" (*tabāhī*), to describe women's religiosity. After diagnosing the lack of religion

⁵³ Thānvī, *Bihishtī zavar*, 22.

as *the disease* inflicting women, he continued, “I thought hard about a possible cure, finding myself perturbed because this ruination was not restricted to matters of their religion alone, but had spread also to their everyday, worldly life as well.”⁵⁴ By speaking like a concerned physician, Thānvī set for himself the crucial task of finding *the cure*.

For Thānvī, women’s “ruination” inflicted their bodies and those of their children and their husbands. He warned that this pandemic problem was spreading swiftly: “Judging from the speed with which this ruination has progressed, it seemed that if reform did not come soon, the disease would become almost incurable. Thus my worry increased for finding the cure.”⁵⁵ For Thānvī, women’s religious life was suffering, bordering on ruination, because they were unaware (*nā-wāqif*) of the “religious sciences” (*‘ulūm dīniyya*).⁵⁶ Because of this shortcoming, Thānvī explained, women were defective in adhering to correct beliefs (*‘aqā’id*), embodying righteous actions (*a‘māl*), transacting correctly with others (*mu‘āmalāt*), inculcating praiseworthy character traits (*akhlāq*), and embracing good social mores (*ṭarz-i mu‘āsharat*).⁵⁷ Thus, for him lack of religious knowledge was the root of women’s ruination. This point underscores the significance of “knowledge of religion” (*‘ilm-i dīn*) as the epistemic field to which orthodox thinkers tethered Muslim subjectivity.

In his introduction to *Heavenly Ornaments*, Thānvī also complained of women’s ordinary styles of speech, identifying certain improper utterances and actions that were to be avoided. This improper chatter included utterances of false beliefs, useless talk, backbiting, and profane language. He does not seem to recognize that his distaste for such

⁵⁴ Thānvī, *Bihishtī zavar*, 22.

⁵⁵ Thānvī, *Bihishtī zavar*, 22.

⁵⁶ Thānvī, *Bihishtī zavar*, 22.

⁵⁷ Thānvī, *Bihishtī zavar*, 22.

banal expressions reflected his *sharīf* sensibilities. In lieu of their ordinary utterance, Thānvī presented a list of simple sentences to his female readership. Analyzing these sentences reveals the sort of literacy he desired for women. The sentences included:

Fear God.
Commit not acts of disobedience.
Wash yourself and observe the ritual prayers.
The one who prays regularly becomes God's beloved.
Be not unjust to anyone.
God listens readily to the prayers of oppressed people.
It is evil to abuse an animal or a bird, or to hit a dog or a cat, without a valid reason.⁵⁸

Thānvī's minimal sentences emphasized consciousness of divine presence, religious rituals, and ethical and moral injunctions. His emphasis on minimal speech for women was comparable to Ḥālī's advices in *Chup kī dād* (*The Virtues of Silence*). With these sentences, Thānvī's imagined female subject entered a sanctified and ethical scene of writing. He instructed her to inscribe herself in the affective structures of belief ("Fear God," and so on), the care of the self ("Wash yourself..."), and the rights of fellow humans ("Be not unjust to anyone") and animals ("It is evil to abuse an animal...").

Thānvī therefore decorated his female subject with pithy formulations for ethical subjectivity and instructed her in rules of etiquette (*alqāb* and *adab*). He also provided several vignettes of Muslim women from early Islamic history, on whom his imagined female subject could rely as role models for cultivating religiosity. The book then provided a list of "correct beliefs" (*'aqā'id*), followed by a list of immoral deeds, inappropriate religious customs, and innovations. He instructed the reader in the evil consequences of disobedience and the good results of obedience. The tome's following

⁵⁸ Thānvī, *Bihishtī zavar*, 32-33.

sections covered rules about the salvation practices; norms pertaining to social transactions; advice on household crafts and skills; stories of pious women from Biblical folklore and early Islamic history; information on sickness and health; and counsels on spiritual self-discipline.⁵⁹ *Heavenly Ornament*'s dizzying topics were divided into eleven parts, consisting of about 800 to 1000 pages (depending on the edition).

Thānvī's *Heavenly Ornaments* sutured together an ideal female subject, whose embodiment of religious knowledge would preserve and transmit Muslim orthodoxy doctrine and practice to future generations. In such treatises, Deobandī scholars imagined a trenchant and life-transforming social reform. They employed tropes of communal conscience and reproductive futurity in order to emphasize the important role of women. As Thānvī declared, "Because children are reared by women, what women utter by their tongues, how they conduct themselves, and their thoughts are all ingrained in the hearts of children."⁶⁰ This religious reform encompassed "social" and "psychic" transformation, as referenced by bodily conduct and heartfelt thoughts. Without religious consciousness and embodied piety, argued Thānvī, a woman would eventually fail her husband and her children. To become religious would not only improve her eschatological fate, but it would also save her from a "disgraceful" (*bē-lutf*) and "repulsive" (*bad maza*) worldly life.⁶¹

Thānvī argued for the worldly relevance of belief in God and angels, biblical prophets and Muḥammad, divine scriptures (the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and

⁵⁹ For an excellent analysis of Thānvī's teachings on health, see Usamah Yasin Ansari, "'Tandrusti deen ka kaam hai': Health as a Matter of Religion in Book 9 of Ashraf Ali Thānvī's *Bahishti Zewar*." *History of Religions* 52.1 (2012): 49-76.

⁶⁰ Thānvī, *Bihishti zewar*, 23.

⁶¹ Thānvī, *Bihishti zewar*, 23.

the Qur’ān included), and divine providence. He explained the relationship between doctrine and daily life in this way: “Wrong beliefs (*bad i ‘tiqādi*) generate immorality (*bad akhlāqi*). Immorality causes indecent actions (*bad a ‘mālī*). Indecent actions give rise to improper transactions with others (*bad mu ‘āmalghi*), which is the root cause of social indignity (*takaddur-i ma ‘ishat*).”⁶² To educate oneself in religious knowledge required a transformation of one’s doctrinal values and salvation practices as well as one’s ethical comportment and social dignity. The borders between the metaphysical and the material were quite blurred for such theologians. Sound belief in metaphysical entities was the guarantor of sound material conditions and relations.

Thānvī urged women to consider how their negligence toward religious knowledge could destroy their domestic and social lives. His teachings on gender roles reveal that “the husband” and “the wife” were important subject positions to embody belief and salvation practices. An ignorant and non-observant wife not only destroys her world and afterlife, but also a pious husband’s worldly life. As he stated, “If the husband has noble capacities, then the poor chap is in for a lifetime of detainment. Her every action brings him distress, and she finds contempt and annoying all of his counsels.”⁶³ Thānvī’s social reform encompassed moral and character formation, but such formation was contingent on correct beliefs and embodiment of the divine norms. For him, the ideal woman is the one who makes her home feel like paradise on earth and embodies sound doctrine and chaste self-discipline.

⁶² Thānvī, *Bihishtī zavar*, 23.

⁶³ Thānvī, *Bihishtī zavar*, 23.

Thānvī's idea of moral and character formation intervened in women's everyday behaviors and patterns of conduct. He taught that moral flaws bring damnation and misfortune not only in the afterlife, but also in this-worldly life. He advised women to reform their character:

Do not speak ill of others, for in so doing you make them your enemies and could be hurt by their enmity in turn. Do not waste your money on useless customs for the sake of fame and repute. Your prosperity turns into poverty when you waste your money. Do not displease your husband. Otherwise, he will become inattentive toward you and might even sever his relations with you and throw you out of the house. Do not go out of your way for your children to tolerate their antics. If you do not discipline them, their flaws and imperfections will put you in sorrow for the rest of your life. Do not desire wealth and trinkets beyond your material capacity. Otherwise, you will be in continuous frustration.⁶⁴

This passage illustrates Thānvī's patriarchal concern for women. He emphasized simultaneously moral formation, the need for pragmatism in household management, androcentric concerns about the husband's displeasure, and the ethics of excessive desire for material things. Thānvī identified religious knowledge (*'ilm-i dīn*) to be the "antidote" to such moral and religious ruination.⁶⁵ The social reform agenda of such theologians intervened in Muslim women's doctrines, salvation practices, domestic lives, and character formation in order to preserve the social order of traditional Muslim society. Along the way, such reformist writings reified an idealized female subject whose proclivities included chastity and piety, but also a desire for "heavenly ornaments."

Ornamental Femininity

Heavenly Ornaments did not rely on the mediation of the father or the husband to address women. Instead, it spoke to women quite frankly, even as it reinscribed them in

⁶⁴ Thānvī, *Bihishtī zavar*, 23.

⁶⁵ Thānvī, *Bihishtī zavar*, 23.

the patriarchal imagination. Thānvī chose “clear and accessible prose” to address his readership, acknowledging that most Muslim women in colonial India were not trained to read technical legal tracts.⁶⁶ More problematically, however, Thānvī revealed his androcentric assumptions about femininity in naming the book, *Heavenly Ornaments*. As he wrote, “Keeping in mind women’s predilection for ornaments, I have named this book, *Bihishtī zewar* [*Heavenly Ornaments*].”⁶⁷ Thānvī assumed that women were predisposed to desire for ornaments. Drawing from Qur’an (43:18), Thānvī put forth two characteristics of “young girls”: “from their childhood onwards, they are fond of jewelry...and they are extremely weak in rhetorical eloquence.”⁶⁸ He condemned their desire for ornaments—the prosthetic, the supplement, the excess—because the ornamental mystifies the ephemeral reality of worldly life. Men who suffer from this desire, Thānvī contended, share the fate of girls and women: “Dandies who desire adornment (*zīnat*) are quite limited and base in their thoughts.”⁶⁹ Thānvī reasoned that because the veneer of the body manifests inner spiritual conditions, preoccupation with ornaments manifests internal excess.

The ornamental, including clothes and attire, explained Thānvī, “might be necessary but are not your final goals.”⁷⁰ He argued that any investment in the ornamental beyond necessity constitutes vanity. Those who embrace vanity often forget the higher moral goals of life. For Thānvī, such vanity characterized femininity: “Girls

⁶⁶ As Thānvī wrote, “I decided to write a book solely for women. In style I wanted to make it clear and accessible, and in content I wanted to cover all of women’s religious needs. Moreover, this book would exclude legal discussions pertaining to men” (Thānvī, *Bihishtī zewar*, 24).

⁶⁷ Thānvī, *Bihishtī zewar*, 24.

⁶⁸ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:212.

⁶⁹ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:212.

⁷⁰ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:212.

are fond of adornments and ornaments, and this fondness suffices to establish the lowly nature of their perspectives and ideas. Men, on the other hand, often embrace simple appearance, and I am not referring to dandies who are dominated by femininity (*zenāna pan*).”⁷¹ Masculinity, for Thānvī, does not entail the need for the supplement, as if it was autonomous and self-contained. But the same cannot be said for femininity, which he characterized as prone to desire for things beyond necessity. In this manner, Thānvī not only conveyed his adherence to misogyny, but also his unease with the ornamental, invoking a logic of necessity that equated the ornamental with the superficial.

Despite his attack on the ornamental, Thānvī played with the imagery of jewelry, using it to allegorize how bodily practices decorate the soul. The real jewels, he argued, are the bodily acts of piety, which ornamented one’s spiritual beliefs. As he continued in the introduction to *Heavenly Ornaments*:

The real ornaments are in fact the salvific virtues of religion. It is due to these virtues that believers shall adorn themselves with jewelry in paradise. In the words of God the Most High, “Gardens of Eden they shall enter; therein they shall be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls, and their garments there will be of silk [Qur’ān, 35:33].” And in the words of the Prophet Muḥammad, “The ornaments of the believer’s body will cover every bodily limb covered by the water of ritual washing.”⁷²

By rendering salvation practices as ornaments of the soul, Thānvī used the imagery of trinkets to allegorize moral formation. If we take seriously his association of femininity with ornaments, then Thānvī’s conjoining of “ornaments” and “heavenly” has deeper implications. By accepting that ornaments are material and spiritual—worldly and otherworldly—Thānvī dislodged femininity from its patriarchal reduction to the ordinary

⁷¹ Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 6:212-3.

⁷² Thānvī, *Bihishtī zavar*, 24.

and the immanent. Feminine embodiment of salvation practices, too, has the potential for moral and ethical transcendence.⁷³

Thānvī therefore disavowed *and* avowed the ornamental and the feminine, embracing the psychical effects of his identification-with women. He assumed women to be emotional, but also used emotionally charged language to relate to his female readers. By analyzing *Heavenly Ornament*'s textual surfaces, we can trace Thānvī's psychic complexes. I argue that his cross-gender projective identification, through which he relates to women, is one of his contradictions for survival. His projective identification with the feminine was quite problematic, for it made it appear as if he had penetrated the subjectivity of "woman," the object of his identification complex. In other words, Thānvī's ability to assume a subject position that was split between the masculine and the

⁷³ Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler inform my reading of the ornamental. Both philosophers take issue with Hegel's reduction of femininity to the ornamental. In his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Hegel wrote, "Womankind—the everlasting irony [in the life] of the community—changes by intrigue the universal end of the government into a private end, transforms its universal activity into a work of some particular individual, and perverts the universal property of the state into a possession and ornament for the Family" (Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, 288). For Hegel, "womankind," or femininity (here spoken of with reference to Sophocles' *Antigone*), had an ironic relation to the community, and to politics for that matter, because women were at once the origin and the reproducers of the *polis*, a position which put them paradoxically excluded them from the public realm proper (at least in Greek society, which forms the basis of the Western philosophical tradition). Bound to the private realm, their political participation privatized the universal aspirations of the political. In her gloss on this passage in *Antigone's Claim*, Judith Butler explains how this privatization takes place: "'womankind' perverts the universal, making the state into possession and ornaments for the family, decorating the family with the paraphernalia of the state, making banners and shawls out of the state apparatus" (Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 35). Hegel thus posited women's everyday life in the sphere of domesticity. The ornamental is one of the mundane and profane, even perverse when particular paraphernalia is involved, spheres in which women drag down the ethicality of universal divine law. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Luce Irigaray turns the Hegelian depoliticization of femininity into the principle of pleasure and political resistance: "To turn it upside down. Refusing to be that unconscious ground that nourishes nature, womanhood would then demand the right to pleasure, to jouissance, even to effective action, thus betraying her universal destiny. What is more, she would pervert the property/propriety of the State by making fun of the adult male who no longer thinks of anything but the universal, subjecting him to derision and to the scorn of a callow adolescence" (Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 225-6). Thānvī's reduction of the feminine to the ornamental is akin to Hegel, but creatively different from him as well. There is a potential of desubjectivation in Thānvī, when he attached, "heavenly," with the ornamental, initiating that contradictory embryo of self-deconstruction in the logic of the ornamental itself.

feminine should be seen as a masculinist strategy. Perhaps it was this psychic ruse that gave him the courage to speak on behalf of women, as if he knew *why* they are predisposed to worldliness, *what* they thought and spoke, and *how* they conducted themselves in everyday life. My reading of Thānvī's identification complex is supported by the biographical details I discussed in the chapter titled, "The Performance of Life and Thought."

Let me summarize those details here. One of Thānvī's relatives had been murdered in a violent clash over land disputes. During the funeral service of this relative, Thānvī washed the corpse and remained unaffected by this loss at first. However, when he returned to the deceased's house, he heard the shrieking cries of the women who had gathered there for a formal mourning session. He was affected by their cries and went into a state of mourning for several days. Within a few days, he lost another relative, and this loss multiplied his sadness. To top it off, he began sensing sporadic attacks of doubt in religious doctrines, and these attacks challenged his faith and certainty. In this existential crisis, he turned to his ṣūfī master, Ḥājī Imdād Allāh, for guidance. Contrary to Thānvī's expectations, Imdād Allāh congratulated him on arriving at the threshold of the ṣūfī spiritual station of self-annihilation! Of crucial significance here is to underscore that it was women's popular custom of excessive weeping and mourning that triggered Thānvī's spiritual crisis.

Such biographical accounts are important, for they provide rare insights into Thānvī's psychic formations. The timing of his spiritual meltdown directly preceded the publication of *Heavenly Ornaments* by a couple of years. This spiritual crisis seems to be the pivotal turning point in his Sufī career, and can be compared to numerous past ṣūfī

accounts of self-doubt and loss of epistemological ground, only to re-emerge on a firmer ground of conviction and certainty. It is in such sudden moments of encountering the irreducibility of alterity that ṣūfīs came face-to-face with the sensible transcendental. In the case of Thānvī, the feminine embodiment of affect had something to do with activating his deeper spirituality.

Gender and Orthodox Structures of Authority

Heavenly Ornaments also exemplified the contradiction between autodidactic agency and reliance on expert authority. Orthodox theologians such as Thānvī empowered women with religious knowledge only to a certain degree. *Heavenly Ornaments* taught women enough religious knowledge to make them “middling scholars” who would still require “expert scholars.” In this regard, ‘Abd al-Bārī Nadvī’s statement is quite telling. Nadvī was one of Thānvī’s disciples and held the professorship in European philosophy at Hyderabad’s Osmania University. After Thānvī’s death, Nadvī wrote several books on his ṣūfī master’s reformist teachings. In one of these texts titled *Tajdīd-i ta’līm wa tablīgh (The Revival of Education and Proselytization)*, he wrote, “Speaking in terms of the dominant language of our times, we could say that in Islamic culture and civilization, woman is fundamentally free of economic burden and responsibility.”⁷⁴ He went on to explain that because women were free of economic responsibility, they had no need of different forms of expert knowledge needed for livelihood. For Nadvī, women required basic knowledge of domestic skills, which would suffice for their management of households. Nadvī extended this logic to the realm of religious knowledge as well, arguing that they were required to learn only those religious

⁷⁴ ‘Abd al-Bārī Nadvī, *Tajdīd-i ta’līm wa tablīgh*, 103.

teachings that would enable them to fulfill their religious obligations and rear their children according to Islamic moral norms. Moreover, Thānvī discouraged women from relying on popular customs. In his ideal world, laypersons ought to consult religious authorities on regular basis, fortifying the societal relevance of the ‘*ulamā*’. With the popularization of print media in colonial India, orthodox theologians rushed to produce reading materials for an autodidactic emergent public.

In this context, Thānvī composed *Heavenly Ornaments* to bring religious knowledge to the homes of Muslim women. He promised his readers, “The woman who reads this book in its entirety will become equivalent to a middling formally educated Muslim scholar (‘*ālim*).”⁷⁵ Realizing how this could imply women’s independence from experts, Thānvī quickly added, “In reality, Muslims can never become independent of their religious authorities.”⁷⁶ Laypersons of both genders were at once assumed to be autodidactic and dependent on expert authority. This paradoxical stance requires closer examination, as it marks the ideal Muslim subject as one who conforms to *and* exceeds the structures of scholarly authority (*taqlīd*). In fact, this paradox illustrates the internal contradiction of mainstream definitions of *taqlīd* in Sunni orthodoxy.

For most Deobandī theologians, *taqlīd* implied “following another person’s saying or action based on trust alone, without requiring legitimate proof.”⁷⁷ However, not all Sunnī scholars have endorsed this definition of *taqlīd*. The eleventh century polymath Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), for example, preferred informed compliance (*ittibā’*)

⁷⁵ Thānvī, *Bihishtī zewar*, 24.

⁷⁶ Thānvī, *Bihishtī zewar*, 24.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar, *Al-Kalām al-mufīd fī ithbāt al-taqlīd* (Gujranwala: Maktaba Ṣafdariya, 2000), 31.

rather than *taqlīd*.⁷⁸ Some Deobandī scholars defined *taqlīd* in ways comparable to Ghazālī’s understanding of moral autonomy. The Deobandī luminary Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī (d. 1880) distinguished between “imitated faith” (*imān-i taqlīdī*) and “ascertained faith” (*imān-i taḥqīqī*).⁷⁹ True faith, he argued, is grounded in independent inquiry and not imitated conformity.

Thānvī’s distinction between moral autonomy and reliance on expert knowledge rewrote their differences within *taqlīd* itself. He distinguished between the *taqlīd* of “a mere imitator” (*muqallid-i mahẓ*) and that of “an investigating imitator” (*muqallid muḥaqqiq*).⁸⁰ Thus, for Thānvī, informed compliance and ascertained faith are forms of *taqlīd*. Thānvī negotiated the contradiction between self-reliance and the need for experts by giving women enough religious knowledge to make them *half*-experts, so that they would still rely on *full*-experts. In this way, they could investigate and then conform to religious norms, but also confirm the authority of religious experts such as Thānvī.

Thānvī’s compromise safeguarded hierarchical structures of traditionalist authority and conformity. What was at stake for Thānvī in safeguarding the authority of the tradition? Authority, argues the German-American political theorist Hannah Arendt,

⁷⁸ As Ebrahim Moosa writes, “Ghazālī was a moralist whose lifelong struggle with the truth resulted in strong advocacy of moral autonomy, resistance to authority, and opposition to *taqlīd*” (“Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī [d. 505/1111]” In *Islamic Legal Thought: A Compendium of Muslim Jurists*, eds. Oussama Arabi, David S. Powers, and Susan A. Spectorsky [Leiden: Brill, 2013], 271).

⁷⁹ See Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib Qāsimī, *Ḥikmat-i Qāsimiyya* (Deoband: Majlis-i Ma‘ārif al-Qur’ān, 1967). For a discussion of Qāsimī’s understanding of *taqlīd* and *ijtihād*, see Ebrahim Moosa, “History and Normativity in Traditional Indian Muslim Thought: Reading Shari‘a in the Hermeneutics of Qari Muhammad Tayyab (d. 1983).” In *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*, eds. Carl W. Ernst and Richard C. Martin (Columbia, S.C.: The University Of South Carolina Press, 2010): 281-301.

⁸⁰ See Muḥammad Zayd Mazāhirī Nadvī, *Ijtihād aur taqlīd kā ākhirī fayṣala: Ifādāt-i Hakīm al-Ummat Ḥaẓrat Thānvī* (Karachi: Zam Zam, 2004), 44.

“always demands obedience, it is commonly mistaken for some form of power.”⁸¹ In distinguishing authority from power and persuasion, Arendt grounded authority in hierarchy (as opposed to the coercion of power and the argumentation of persuasion). For Arendt, authoritarianism must be distinguished from totalitarianism and egalitarianism (or coercion and persuasion). Arendt’s description of authority resonates with the Sunni orthodox understanding of *taqlīd*, whose mainstream definition emphasizes “trust” and precludes persuasion and coercion.

The subject of *taqlīd* locates authenticity outside of herself, exercising her autonomy to rely on heteronomy. If she is coerced or persuaded to follow Muslim juridical and moral norms, she is no longer engaged in *taqlīd*.⁸² If we distinguish authority from power, right, tyranny, influence, and charisma, we might be able to diagnose better the internal logic of *taqlīd*.⁸³ In enabling women to become *half*-experts, Thānvī was essentially re-inscribing them within authoritarianism.

⁸¹ Hannah Arendt, “What is Authority?” In *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 92-3.

⁸² Such a conception of authority differs from how Islamicists have generally understood this concept. For example, in their introduction to *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*, Gudrun Kramer and Sabine Schmidtke write: “*Religious* authority can assume a number of forms and functions: the ability (chance, power, or right) to define correct belief and practice, or orthodoxy and orthopraxy, respectively; to shape and influence the views and conduct of others accordingly; to identify, marginalize, punish or exclude deviance, heresy and apostasy and their agents and advocates. In monotheistic religions founded on revealed scripture, religious authority further involves the ability (chance, power, or right) to compose and define the canon of “authoritative” texts and the legitimate methods of interpretation” (Gudrun Kramer and Sabine Schmidtke. “Introduction: Religious Authority and Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies. A Critical Overview.” In *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*, eds. Gudrun Kramer and Sabine Schmidtke [Leiden: Brill, 2006], 1-2). It also differs from the ways in which Sherman Jackson and Mohammad Fadel have recuperated the notion of *taqlīd*. See Sherman Jackson, “*Taqlīd*, Legal Scaffolding and the Scope of Legal Injunctions in Post-Formative Theory: *Mutlaq* and ‘*Amm* in the Jurisprudence of Shihah al-Din al-Qarafi.” *Islamic Law and Society* 3.2 (1996): 165-192; Mohammad Fadel, “The Social Logic of *Taqlīd* and the Rise of the *Mukhtaṣar*.” *Islamic Law and Society* 3.2 (1996): 193-233.

⁸³ It is important to note that Weber distinguished between power and authority.

Arendt explains that authoritarianism is predicated upon hierarchy, which gives coherence not just to a system of relations between people, but also, and more importantly, to an “order of things,” a natural world, a cosmology. In Platonic and Aristotelian political philosophies, revelation of knowledge and freedom of action were distributed differently between men and women, children and adults, slaves and masters, students and teachers, and so on. As Arendt points out, Aristotle was the first philosopher who turned to the idea of “nature” in order to justify this hierarchical cosmology. For Aristotle, it was *natural* for a child to rely on an adult, for a student to learn from a teacher, and for a woman to be subservient to a man. Authoritarianism, for Arendt, implies a naturalization of inequality, and presupposes an unchallenged notion of hierarchical relations and an uneven distribution of power. The structure of *taqlīd*, with its foundations in prophetic authority, enacts a similar, if not an identical, hierarchy. The “imitator” (*muqallid*) trusts the “expert” (*mujtahid*) because such trust has been naturalized in this hierarchical relation. *Taqlīd* in its idealistic sense presupposes a natural hierarchy between the expert and the imitator. This is why Thānvī insisted that following one of the four Sunni Schools was tantamount to following the divine norms.

Thānvī emphasized especially women’s reform because as a subordinated class, their resistance to authority and tradition was alarming. Based on Thānvī’s hierarchical understanding of social reality, women should have naturally and by internal persuasion trusted religious authorities and embodied such authorities’ interpretations of the divine norms. For Thānvī, the ruination of women’s conformity to tradition forecasted the death of the hierarchical order, as women, along with children, slaves, and pupils were located at the bottom of the hierarchical pyramid of authority. These figures inhabited

paradoxical subject positions, for they were at once the supplement and the substance of the hierarchical pyramid of authoritarianism.

Historically speaking, it is quite hard to verify whether or not *taqlīd* in this sense really existed in colonial India, despite the robust claims of orthodox scholars that they had revived this concept and practice. The point is to understand the structural logic of *taqlīd* in contradistinction to power and persuasion. The loss or severe fragmentation of such a notion of *taqlīd* has huge implications for how we understand Sunni traditionalism in colonial India. What we know is that scholars such as Thānvī did sense a crisis of *taqlīd*, which guided their configuration of religion and tradition in the colonial context.

Thānvī's efforts in this regard were prolific. His idiom and diction, style of expression, and affective tone, reveal that he was worried about the waning of the authoritarian order. He expressed this concern by his own words of "the ruination of religion," which was in reality the ruination of authority. The loss of authority, as Arendt explains, is "tantamount to the loss of the groundwork of the world," as it was authority that "gave the world the permanence and durability which human beings need precisely because they are mortals—the most unstable and futile beings we know of."⁸⁴ Thus from his patriarchal and authoritarian point of view, Thānvī carried a hurtful heart full of pain at the sight of ruination, as he was witnessing the destruction of the hierarchical relational structures that had ordered and given the pretence of permanence to his world. In the decades following the appearance of *Heavenly Ornaments*, Thānvī emerged as a leading Muslim jurist, Sufi, and theologian of late colonial India. His legal writings on women's rights, especially marital rights, came to represent the authoritative position of Deobandī

⁸⁴ Arendt, "What is Authority?" 95.

‘*ulamā*’. By 1939, the colonial state instituted his legal counsels on Muslim women’s marital problems, thanks in no small part to the 1931 text, *The Successful Stratagem for the Helpless Wife*.

Conclusion

The above analysis of domesticity and gender formation in Thānvī’s archives illustrates how such theologians used the figure of the ideal woman to mediate their anxieties about Muslim social and political displacement in colonial modernity. The affinity between their discourses of domesticity and those of Victorianism serves to demonstrate how femininity became one of the major nodes through which colonialist officials and local social actors experimented with competing patriarchies. I have also argued that while there were significant conceptual overlaps between the patriarchal imagination of Muslim orthodoxy and Muslim modernism, orthodox scholars paid exclusive attention to legalism. They defined domesticity and gender roles within strictly legal frameworks. Muslim women and men became legal subjects, they argued, by submitting themselves to established orthodox interpretations of the divine norms. According to theologians such as Thānvī, Muslim women and men must conform to the authority of the legal tradition in order to count as Muslim. In this way, social reform of women’s rights became entirely contingent on legalism. I have also shown how such experts of Islamic law maintained discursive monopoly over legal interpretation. This form of authoritarianism, I argued relying on Arendt’s analysis of authority, hierarchized social relations and naturalized gender asymmetries. In the next chapter, I examine how by the late 1930s, colonial courts had recognized the authority of orthodox legal experts in matters of Muslim personal law. These orthodox interventions into the public sphere

show how traditionalists such as Thānvī not only survived colonial modernity, but also thrived in its territorializing juridical structures.

Chapter 6. The Theater of Legalism: Difference and Equality

The preceding chapter contextualized Thānvī's views on gender. This chapter continues the story of Muslim orthodoxy's gendered tensions by moving beyond domesticity and analyzing public debates on Muslim women's rights in colonial India. My analysis of these debates reveals how Muslim orthodoxy constructed kinship through heterosexual coupledness. In the legal imaginary of Muslim orthodoxy, the heterosexual couple was the foundation of kinship. The couple emerged through the act of marriage (*nikāḥ*), which Muslim sacred law understood as a contract between a man and a woman. Marriage was thus a social institution that legalized sexual pleasure and biological reproduction. In the Islamic legal tradition, women inhabited contradictory positions in relation to marriage. On the one side, sacred law accepted women as legal subjects in charge of their marital contracts. On the other side, however, sacred law treated women as objects with exchange value and did not grant them equal rights to divorce.

Thānvī inherited this tension and its attendant patriarchal assumptions: he encouraged women to take advantage of legal opportunities that afforded them power and prestige within their marriages, but he also exhorted women to be obedient to their husbands and respect masculine authority. This contradiction—between equality and difference—yields us another textured scene to analyze Thānvī's strategies of survival and tactics of thriving. The theater of legalism documents the powerful invocations of *'ilm-i dīn* in the spheres of governmentality and juridical officialdom. In this chapter, I argue that in addition to serving as an allegory for dignity and communal conscience, the Muslim woman—and questions of her agency and rights—became a discursive site from where orthodox theologians and jurists entered the colonial milieu of governmentality. I

therefore closely examine how Thānvī's legal writings on women's rights, especially the right to divorce, were situated within the larger political project of colonial modernity.

Let me first address the immediate context of Thānvī's legal writings on Muslim women's right to divorce. During the first decades of the twentieth century, numerous Muslim women experienced difficulties in terminating unhappy or unwanted marriages. According to the Ḥanafī School, a Muslim woman had two options when her husband was unwilling to practice his androcentric privilege of pronouncing the divorce speech act (*ṭalāq*). She could either terminate the marriage contract by invoking *khul'* (dissolution of the marriage contract wherein she paid her husband a significant sum of money) or by petitioning a Muslim judge (*qāḍī*). Not all Muslim women could afford the first option. The second option, too, was limited to Muslim princely states and some towns in the provinces of Bihar and Orissa where *qāḍīs* commanded communal authority.¹ Due to these foreclosures of the "proper" legal solutions, some Muslim women chose apostasy in order to terminate their marriage. According to the default Ḥanafī position, a wife's apostasy dissolved her marriage contract (*nikāḥ*). Women who wanted to end a marriage contract but whose husbands refused to pronounce the divorce statement were stuck, so to speak, in a prison-like living situation. In this situation, some Muslim women strategically exploited the legal loophole of apostasy in order to exit unwanted marriages.

¹ In 1921, a traditionalist scholar, Abu'l-Maḥāsīn Muḥammad Sajjād, founded a *qāḍī* institution in Bihar as the first instantiation of the Imārat-i Sharī'at, a "network of informal tribunals" that adjudicated "marriage, divorce, and inheritance issues in terms of Islamic law" (Ebrahim Moosa, "Shari'at Governance in Colonial and Postcolonial India," in *Islam in South Asia in Practice*, ed. Barbara D. Metcalf [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009], 317).

These instances of apostasy gave fodder to colonial critics, many of whom had already identified native religious laws and practices as sources of gender oppression and female subordination. Muslim women's apostasy signalled the failed delivery of justice in Islamic law. These cases of apostasy cast a shameful shadow on the conscience of India's Muslim apologists. Muslim modernists challenged orthodox authorities—the '*ulamā*'—to reinterpret classical and medieval Ḥanafī regulations about marriage and divorce. The modernists argued that a woman should not have to resort to apostasy for terminating an oppressive marriage. For Muslim modernists, the spirit of the revealed norms not only permitted but also required a critical rethinking (*ijtihād*) of unbearable and impractical legal norms and procedures.

Thānvī was among the traditionalist scholars who responded to this challenge on behalf of the orthodox establishment. His critical rethinking involved careful and conservative citations and interpretations of classical and medieval sacred law. Thānvī's writings on Muslim women's right to divorce were full of legal minutiae and circuitous forms of jurisprudential reasoning. In the thicket of these details, we encounter Thānvī qua jurist in search of a reasonable solution to this problem. He thus explored possible solutions in his legal tradition, namely Ḥanafī law, but also in Mālikī legalism, in order to unfetter the Muslim woman from the constrictions of traditional and customary marital norms. While Thānvī's writings on the divorce problem identified certain solutions, these texts also reinscribed female agency and legal personhood within the juridical structures of *taqlīd*-based Islamic law. The procedural routes through which Muslim women were granted conditional legal agency resembled modern governmentality's controlling reach into the private sphere.

Muslim Women between Sacred Law and Colonial Governmentality

In his famous lectures delivered during the late 1920s, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, the Indian Muslim philosopher and poet Muḥammad Iqbāl (1877-1938) lamented, “In the Punjab, as everybody knows, there have been cases in which Muslim women wishing to get rid of undesirable husbands have been driven to apostasy.”² Iqbāl was perturbed about contemporaneous Indian Muslim women who had chosen apostasy in order to escape unwanted marriages.³ Iqbāl argued that *fiqh* specialists should reinterpret the law to meet people’s actual needs. Moreover, he urged *fiqh* specialists to return to classical and medieval arguments about the greater objectives of the law. In this regard, Iqbāl encouraged the ‘*ulamā*’ to consult past jurists, such as the medieval Spanish legal philosopher Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī (d. 1388). Iqbal reverentially cited Shāṭibī: “The Law of Islam, says the great Spanish jurist Imam Shatibi in his *Al-Muwafaqat*, aims at protecting five things—*Din, Nafs, ‘Aql, Mal, and Nasl*.”⁴ For Shāṭibī, the following five ideals constituted the objectives of the revealed norms (*maqāṣid al-sharī‘a*): religion, life, reason, property, and progeny.

On Iqbāl’s account, Indian *fiqh* authorities were too concerned with second-order legal minutiae and had ignored the first-order objectives of the law. He diagnosed a certain stagnation of critical legal thinking in Indian *fiqh* circles: “In view of the intense conservatism of the Muslims of India, Indian judges cannot but stick to what are called

² Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, ed. M. Saeed Sheikh (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2004), 134.

³ According to Muhammad Khalid Mas‘ud, reports about Muslim women’s apostasy can be found in the following legal cases of colonial India: *Amin Beg vs Saman* (1920) 33 Allahabad 90; *Musammāt Reshman vs Khuda Bakhsh* (1937) 19 Lahore 271; *Ghaus vs Musammāt Fiji* (1915) Lahore; as well as the following law reports from the All India Law Reports: 1913 Calcutta 430; 1914 Sindh 145; 1924 Lahore 397; 1928 Lahore 954; 1934 Lahore 976; 1936 Lahore 666; 1937 Lahore 759; 1938 Lahore 277. See Muhammad Khalid Mas‘ud, *Iqbal’s Reconstruction of Ijtihad* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1995): 175-6.

⁴ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, 134.

standard works. The result is that while the peoples are moving the law remains stationary.”⁵ With these words, Iqbāl captured a widespread modernist criticism of orthodox scholars. For him, people were moving, even toward apostasy, while the judges of sacred law were stagnant. Iqbāl was ultimately asking the ‘*ulamā*’ to rescue Muslim women who had reverted to apostasy in order to seek justice and end marital oppression. It is noteworthy that modernists such as Iqbāl understood the limits of their own intellectual production: while they could write works of poetry and philosophy, they could not write *fiqh* texts that would reinterpret received laws within the major law schools.

Thānvī answered this modernist challenge on behalf of the ‘*ulamā*’. As Muhammad Qasim Zaman notes, “Thanawi took the lead in responding to this crisis.”⁶ By the late 1920s, Thānvī was generally considered to be the most senior authority within the ranks of Deobandī scholars. In his capacity as the spiritual luminary of this branch of Muslim orthodoxy, he attempted to offer a legal solution to the plight of Muslim women by publishing *The Successful Stratagem for the Helpless Wife*.

The social life of *The Successful Stratagem* has been more political than the bulk of Thānvī’s oeuvre. The text first entered the arena of colonial governmentality in the late 1930s when the Muslim orthodox group, the Jamī‘at al-‘Ulamā’-yi Hind, used its public platform to petition for the legislation of Thānvī’s *fatwa*.⁷ While Thānvī avoided this

⁵ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, 134. It is interesting to note that Iqbal’s criticism of the ‘*ulamā*’ is itself contradictory. On the one hand, he attributed the problem of stagnation to “the intense conservatism of the Muslims of India,” suggesting that *fiqh* specialists cannot but “stick to” canonical sources. On the other hand, he portrayed “the people” to be mobile and “the law” to be stationary.

⁶ Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age*, 87.

⁷ Mas‘ud, “Apostasy and Judicial Separation in British India,” 196; Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought*, 87.

group's intense anti-colonial political activities, he vocally supported their efforts to intervene in the colonial state machinery on behalf of "the helpless wife." The Jamī'at's historian, Sayyid Muḥammad Miyan (1903-1975), acknowledged Thānvī's leading role in this regard in his 1946 historiographical work, *Jamī'at al-'Ulamā' kyā hai? (What is the Jamī'at al-'Ulamā'?)*.⁸

The Jamī'at urged English-educated Muslims to petition colonial legislative institutions on behalf of the 'ulamā'. This public debate finally entered "official" circles in the mid-1930s. As the Indian legal scholar Asaf A.A. Fyzee explained, "After a great deal of public agitation Qazi Muhammad Ahmad Kazmi introduced a bill in the central legislature on 17 April 1936. Ultimately, the bill was passed with suitable modifications and became law on 17 March 1939 as the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act 1939, and ever since it has been hailed as one of the most progressive enactments passed by the legislature."⁹ A member of the Central Legislative Assembly, the North Indian Muslim lawyer Kazmi petitioned the colonial state to adopt some of Thānvī's legal positions from *The Successful Stratagem*. Kazmi's efforts resulted in the 1939 passing of the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act. The revised Act, however, did not satisfy the demands of Deobandī 'ulamā'.

The citation and circulation of *The Successful Stratagem for the Helpless Wife* in colonial officialdom demonstrated how Muslim family law was a major node of discursive and legal debate and struggle between state institutions and traditionalist scholars. The Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act 1939 marked an important formation:

⁸ See Sayyid Muḥammad Miyan, *Jamī'at al-'Ulamā' kyā hai?* (Lahore: Jamī'at al-'Ulamā-yi Pakistan, n.d.), 30; 74.

⁹ Asaf A.A. Fyzee, *Outlines of Muhammadan Law*, ed. and revised by Tahir Mahmood (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 132.

colonial and then post-colonial state juridical institutions in South Asia started listening to the interpretations of orthodox scholars in matters of family law, even if orthodox positions mutated in the process of becoming official law.¹⁰ This trend continued after the partition of India as well. The most explicit illustration of the political power wielded by orthodox clergy was the Indian legislative turmoil over the Shah Bano case in the 1980s.¹¹

Shah Bano was a 62-year old Indian Muslima whose marriage of 40 years came to a sudden end when her husband pronounced the divorce speech act (*talāq*). The husband discontinued providing her financial support after a few months following the divorce, arguing that he had fulfilled her post-marital rights as mandated by Muslim sacred law. Shah Bano found herself stranded and took her case to the courts. The Supreme Court of India ruled in her favor and required the husband to furnish her with continued financial dividends. Progressive Muslim intellectuals and feminist activists applauded the Supreme Court's ruling. For Deobandī theologians, however, the Supreme Court's decision was an encroachment on the sacred law of a minority population.

Deobandī scholars argued that the ruling violated Muslim personal law statutes that had been guaranteed to the Muslim minority at the time of the partition of India. The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board, a non-governmental organization, thus organized a national campaign calling for the reversal of the ruling. Under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's watch, the Indian Parliament repealed the Supreme Court's ruling by passing

¹⁰ On the complicated history of this bill, see Rohit De, "Mumtaz Bibi's Broken Heart: The Many Lives of the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act." *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 46.1 (2009): 105-130.

¹¹ On the Shah Bano controversy, see Zakia Pathak and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, "Shahbano." *Signs* 14.3 (1989): 558-582.

the Muslim Women's Act in 1986. This statute reinstated colonial legislative policies and gave male '*ulamā*' the authority to determine the marital rights of Muslim women. In this context, orthodox authorities invoked *The Successful Stratagem* to argue that traditionalist interpretations of sacred law had already given Muslim women their due rights.

In what follows, I expand the scholarship on Muslim family law in colonial and postcolonial India by analyzing critically Thānvī's "solution" to Muslim women's marital problems. Although *The Successful Stratagem* addressed the legal question of divorce, Thānvī's other writings addressed moral and ethical aspects of married life. For example, he discussed marital matters in detail in the second half of his 1920 massive tome, *Iṣlāḥ-i inqilāb-i ummat* (*Reforming the Alteration of the Muslim Community*).¹² I concentrate exclusively on *The Successful Stratagem* in order to achieve several analytical goals: to understand how Thānvī interpreted legal problems, how he imagined the revealed norms in relation to modern legal codification, and how he used legalism to consolidate heterosexual coupledness, normative kinship arrangements, and the political economy of marriage. On my reading, Thānvī's *Successful Stratagem* was an illustration of *ijtihād*, but also a demonstration of his conformist oscillation between gendered equality and gendered difference vis-à-vis the relational and social institution of marriage.¹³

¹² Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Iṣlāḥ-i inqilāb-i ummat* (Karachi: Idārat al-Ma'ārif, 1998).

¹³ For Zaman, Thānvī's legal thinking as expressed in *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājiya* is "the closest approximation of the practice of *ijtihād* in late colonial India" (*Modern Islamic Thought*, 86). Zaman's assessment is accurate with reference to Deobandī and Barelvī '*ulamā*', but not if we expand the practice of *ijtihād* beyond the discursive constellations of the '*ulamā*'. The writings of Abū'l-A'ālā Mawdūdī (d. 1979), who was an active Muslim intellectual of late colonial India and post-colonial Pakistan, furnished many examples of *ijtihād*.

The Successful Stratagem for the Helpless Wife

In the late 1920s Thānvī started intellectual correspondence with several leading Ḥanafī jurists of India and Hijaz-based Mālikī jurists of West and North Africa. The subject of this correspondence was women's right to divorce. Thānvī's Hijaz-based consultants included the Saharan scholar Sa'īd b. Ṣiddīq al-Fulāta (1892-1934), the Senegalese scholar and poet Alfā Muḥammad Hāshim (1866-1930), the Malian scholar Muḥammad Ṭayyib b. Ishāq al-Anṣārī (1879-1943), and the Tunisian scholar Ṣāliḥ b. al-Fuḍayl al-Tūnisī (1877-1956). Thānvī's Deobandī colleague Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī (1879-1957) coordinated this transnational correspondence.

In 1931 Thānvī spent around a thousand rupees to publish his research on this topic in the form of a major legal treatise on women's marital rights, namely *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājjizat li'l-ḥalīlat al-ʿājizah* (*The Successful Stratagem for the Helpless Wife*).¹⁴ Thānvī noted this text's collective authorship and duly acknowledged the help of his research assistants. This meticulous text explained and developed intricate lines of legal argumentation about marriage and divorce. Thānvī and his fellow authors supplemented the jurisprudence of their legal school with perspectives from the Mālikī School. *The Successful Stratagem* thus marked the inadequacy of a single and self-contained legal and moral discursive tradition to solve problems faced by Muslims in colonial modernity.¹⁵ After finishing the composition of this text, Thānvī remarked, "This has been the most

¹⁴ Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājjizat li'l-ḥalīlat al-ʿājizah ya'nī awrataun kā ḥaqq-i tansīkh-i nikāḥ* (Karachi: Dār al-Isha'āt, 1987). Throughout this dissertation, I refer to this text as *The Successful Stratagem for the Helpless Wife*, but as *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājjiza* in the footnotes. All translations are mine.

¹⁵ Ḥanafī law on marriage and divorce was revised in other colonial contexts as well. An example is the Egyptian Law No. 29 of 1929, which amended Ḥanafī positions on women's right to divorce with Mālikī positions. See 'Abd al-Wahhāb Khallāf, *Aḥkām al-aḥwāl al-shakhṣiyyat fī'l-sharī'at al-islāmiyya 'alā madhhab al-imām Abī Ḥanīfa wa mā 'alayhi al-'amal al-ān bi'l-maḥākīm al-shar'iyyat al-Miṣriyya* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1938): 296-299.

difficult writing project of my life.”¹⁶ The difficulty resulted not due to the involved hermeneutical schemes, which Thānvī and fellow authors had mastered, but because traditionalism required loyalty to a single school of *fiqh* and this text had amalgamated the legalism of two *fiqh* schools.

Several subsequent editions of *The Successful Stratagem for the Helpless Wife* appeared following the partition of India in 1947. In postcolonial South Asia, this text continued to frame Deobandī discussions of family law. Many Deobandī scholars dubbed Thānvī a *mujtahid*, an exemplar of critical legal thinking. According to the prominent postcolonial Indian Ḥanafī jurist Mujāhid al-Islām Qāsimī (1936-2002), Thānvī “was the leading mujtahid after [Shāh] Wali Allah.”¹⁷ In his introduction to the 1987 Pakistani edition of *The Successful Stratagem*, the Karachi-based Ḥanafī jurist and Ḥadīth scholar Muḥammad Taqī ‘Usmānī wrote: “God had handpicked Mawlānā Thānvī for fulfilling the religious needs of Muslims in all aspects of their lives.”¹⁸ These laudatory remarks illustrate that Thānvī’s legacy as a Muslim mystic, theologian, and reformer has been profoundly interwoven with his profile as a legal thinker and a specialist of canonical Islamic law.

The Successful Stratagem for the Helpless Wife was a multi-layered text. Its authorship cannot be attributed to Thānvī alone. The following scholars all played active roles in its composition: Thānvī’s nephew and leading Ḥadīth scholar Zafar Aḥmad ‘Usmānī (1892-1974), Thānvī’s disciple and Muftī of the Deoband seminary Muḥammad Shaḥī‘ (1897-1976), and Thānvī’s personal assistant and *fiqh* specialist ‘Abd al-Karīm

¹⁶ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*, 3:245.

¹⁷ Quoted in Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age*, 88.

¹⁸ Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājiza*, 9. The 1987 edition includes as an appendix the text of ‘Usmānī’s *fatwa* on marriage and divorce.

(1897-1948). *The Successful Stratagem* was therefore a collective endeavor of Thānvī's ṣūfī lodge.¹⁹ The juristic opinions outlined therein were based on established Ḥanafī and Mālikī positions. The text included *fatwas* from the above-mentioned Mālikī authorities based in the Arabian cities of Mecca and Medina. Additionally, the text showcased the signatures and letters of approval from Indian experts of Ḥanafī *fiqh*. In terms of language, this Urdu text quoted long Arabic passages quite liberally from canonical legal sources. The inclusion of these un-translated passages tells us something important about this text's assumed readership: it was written for both lay Muslims and *fiqh* experts. Arguably, such passages were included to intimidate lay Muslims and colonial officials, emphasizing that the latter were dependent on *fiqh* experts for understanding sacred law.

The Successful Stratagem for the Helpless Wife and its appendices addressed three central issues: women's empowerment to shape their marriage contracts (*ṭalāq al-tafwīd*), valid grounds for the annulment of the marriage (*tansīkh al-nikāḥ*), and the annulment of marriage in cases of religious apostasy (*irtidād*). The text assumed legalism to be the sole framework for addressing women's agency, especially in their marital relationships. Thānvī's expressions, "the helpless wife" (*al-ḥalīlat al-'ājizah*) and "the oppressed woman" (*mazlūma*), indicated his semi-sympathetic and semi-patronizing view of gender injustice and marital troubles. For him, the true cause of marital discord was the absence or impoverishment of religious knowledge (*'ilm-i dīn*), especially the knowledge of sacred law. He thus argued that sacred law granted women rights and protections that could relieve them from domestic hardships. He thus turned to classical and medieval schools of sacred law for identifying the solution to the helpless wife's problems.

¹⁹ Zaman calls it "a collective ijtihad" (*Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age*, 88).

Thānvī followed the Ḥanafī School in *ṭalāq al-tafwīd* and borrowed from the Mālikī School to modify Ḥanafī positions on *tansīkh al-nikāḥ* and *irtidād*. In so doing, Thānvī followed the precedents of earlier Ḥanafī authorities, especially the early modern Syrian jurist Ibn ‘Ābidīn (d. 1836), who had approvingly cited Mālikī positions in matters of *tansīkh al-nikāḥ*. By aligning himself with Ibn ‘Ābidīn, Thānvī differed from stricter Indian Ḥanafīs, such as the mid-nineteenth century jurist Muftī Ṣadr al-Dīn Azurda of Delhi, who rigorously upheld the Ḥanafī position on *tansīkh al-nikāḥ*.²⁰

Thānvī chose the *fatwa* genre to discuss marital matters. While he was mindful of this genre’s waning authority to intervene in colonial courts, he hoped that educated upper class Muslims would petition the colonial state to translate his scholarly counsel into official policy. In this regard, he criticized some Western-educated Muslims for objecting to *qāḍī* courts, but praised colonial authorities sympathetic to the establishment of *qāḍī* courts: “The English administrators say that we did not sense the need for *qāḍī* courts, otherwise we were ready to establish them. Unfortunately, the English are ready to establish our courts, but some Muslims are not ready to support this agendum. Our adversaries agree with us and our friends have turned against us. Someone will now accuse me of praising the English. Let me clarify my position: I do not praise the English, but only describe the reality!”²¹ Thānvī’s desire for juridical reform came to fruition when colonial legislation started reflecting the concerns of orthodox jurists.²²

²⁰ Sayyid Muḥammad Fārūq Bukhārī, “Ṣadr al-Dīn Khān Azurda Dihlawī aur unkā risāla *Al-Durr al-mandūd fī ḥukm imra’at al-mafqūd*.” *Ma’ārif* 145.1 (1990): 46-57; Masud, “Apostasy and Judicial Separation in British India,” 202.

²¹ Rānā Muḥammad Ashraf, *Ḥaṣrat Ḥakīm al-ummat aur unke khulafā’ kī siyāsī khidmat kā tafṣīlī jā’iza* (Bahawalnagar: Idāra-yi Ta’līfāt-i Ashrafīyya, n.d.), 28.

²² Masud, “Apostasy and Judicial Separation in British India,” 196.

Contractual Limits: ṭalāq al-tafwīd

The first chapter of *The Successful Stratagem* consisted of a question and an answer, which encompassed legal reasoning and citations from evidentiary texts. We do not know the identity of the questioner. It is possible that Thānvī and his assistants crafted this rhetorical question themselves. The text's opening question asked simply but poignantly: what legal resources do Muslim women have in cases where they suffer injustice in marriage? The question's wording admitted that gender inequality had become a troubling aspect of contemporary Indo-Muslim society: "one cannot describe the types of hardships [*pareshāniyan*] women face in their marriages these days."²³ The question mentioned several examples of these hardships: oppression (*ẓulm*), rudeness (*be rukhī*), husbands' failure to provide for wives, husbands' refusal to agree to divorce proceedings, husbands' abandonment of their families, and husbands who turned out to be impotent after the *nikāḥ* or became mentally deranged.²⁴ The questioner lamented the loss of *qāḍī* courts in British India, indicating implicitly that Muslim women would not have faced such severe hardships in terminating their marriages had the colonial state kept such legal institutions intact. The question concluded by asking for clarification regarding the permissibility of prenuptial contracts, especially those which granted women considerable agency to prevent marital oppression.

Explicitly, the questioner acknowledged the presence of marital troubles. This acknowledgement offers us an insight into how such Muslim devotees and legalists dealt with questions of applied ethics. For laypersons and experts who conceived of applied

²³ Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājiza*, 19.

²⁴ Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājiza*, 19.

ethics in legalist frameworks, canonical *fiqh* served as a refuge from the violence of everyday life. Thānvī and company affirmed the legal permissibility of prenuptial contracts initiated by the wife. They asserted that women had the legal right to propose marriage contracts and determine the conditions of terminating these contracts. In Ḥanafī legalism, such contracts were called *tafwīd* (and the dissolution of such contracts was called *ṭalāq al-tafwīd*). *Tafwīd* was not restricted to prenuptial contracts alone, but also allowed for modifications to the original marriage contract even after years of marriage.

Thānvī and his disciples explained in sufficient detail the legal minutiae pertaining to three types of *tafwīd*: before, during, and after the officiating of the marriage (*nikāḥ*). For the strictly prenuptial contracts, they pointed out that it was necessary to mention the word, *nikāḥ*, in the contract document, otherwise it carried no legal value and did not guarantee the woman any legal power in her marriage. The most complicated form of *tafwīd* was when conditions were added during the officiating of the *nikāḥ*. Unlike the traditional procedure of *nikāḥ* wherein the man or his guardians initiated the proceedings, in such *tafwīd* contracts it was necessary for the woman to initiate the proposal of marriage (*ijāb*). In the act of *ijāb*, the woman or her guardian specified the conditions of annulment. In cases where her specified conditions were violated, she retained the right to pronounce the divorce speech act herself (by saying, “I give myself one divorce [*ṭalāq*]”). Thānvī and company stressed again how it was important for the woman to initiate the proposal. If the man proposed the contract and the woman merely added to this contract her specified conditions of annulment, then their marriage would be valid but her proposed conditions of annulment would be ineffective (as their validity was based on *her* initiating of the *nikāḥ* proposal). Such legalism obviously entertained

the possibility of female agency, and traditionalist jurists were willing to accept an agential female subject who could propose her marriage, stipulate its terms, and enunciate the divorce speech act herself. The third type of *tafwīd* involved mending the marriage contract with conditions of annulment after the *nikāḥ* had taken place. However, unlike the first two forms, the third form of *tafwīd* was entirely contingent on the husband's agreement with the wife's specified changes to the marriage contract. She could amend the original contract only if her husband agreed to the proposed changes. For this reason, Thānvī and his fellow jurists urged women to take advantage of the first two types of *tafwīd* in which the husband's consent was not required.

Thānvī and company relied on earlier Ḥanafī authorities to identify a limited form of female agency in the legal device of *tafwīd*. From their summary of Ḥanafī positions, and their continuous reminders to women on how to secure best their rights and legal entitlements, Thānvī and his disciples wanted to displace deep-seated assumptions about patriarchal constrictions around female agency. While this was true to a certain degree, such orthodox jurists nonetheless proffered misogynistic views of femininity. After mentioning the above legal rulings, the authors included a subsection titled, “necessary advice” (*ẓarūrī mashwara*), in which they regulated female agency. Their “advice” began with the argument that women were “deficient in intellect” (*nāqiṣāt fi'l-‘aql*) and therefore could not exercise absolute freedom in determining the terms of their marriages. This “advice” served to temper medieval Ḥanafī positions on *tafwīd*.

For Thānvī and company, the proper way to execute *ṭalāq al-tafwīd* was for the woman to seek the help of two or more male consultants. If the male consultants agreed that the husband had violated the terms of the marriage, then the woman had the right to

terminate her marriage. Thānvī and his disciples further cautioned their female readership not to act on feelings of anger: “Do not exercise this right of yours when you are angry. Take some time, at the least a week, to reflect and think about your condition.”²⁵ Moreover, they advised women to consult their true well-wishers, and to perform the ritual prayer called *istikhāra*, supplicating to God for inspiration and guidance. Before providing a couple of examples of *tafwīd* contracts, Thānvī and company advised women to think twice about nuances of language when writing contracts. For example, the expressions, “If you so desire” and “whenever you want,” were to be avoided since they were specific to the time and place of the *nikāḥ* ceremony. All in all, the chapter on *ṭalāq al-tafwīd* both affirmed and negated gender difference and equality in relation to marriage and divorce. The “advice” at the end revealed orthodox scholars’ paranoia about female agency and women’s right to self-govern their domestic and social lives.

Annulment Limits: tansīkh al-nikāḥ

The second part of *The Successful Stratagem for the Helpless Wife* discussed “annulment of marriage” (*tansīkh al-nikāḥ*) in several scenarios, including the case of the impotent husband (*‘anīn*), the case of the mentally disabled husband (*majnūn*), and the case of the missing husband (*mafqūd*). However, before discussing the legal minutiae of *tansīkh al-nikāḥ*, the authors felt necessary to comment on despondent condition of Muslim legal institutions in colonial India. Thānvī and his associates therefore began this section by addressing the role of *qāḍīs* in the distribution of social justice. The *qāḍī*, they explained, had the legal authority to invalidate a marriage in cases where husbands

²⁵ Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājiza*, 24.

refused to initiate divorce proceedings.²⁶ By invoking the juridical authority of *qāḍīs*, the text highlighted *fiqh*'s in-built stratagems for ensuring justice. However, *qāḍī*-justice had become quite limited in colonial India. As Thānvī and company noted, "Because Muslim judges are hardly found in Hindustan, we have to consider alternative solutions to this problem."²⁷ Yet, these authors were mindful that the colonial state had appointed Muslim judges in some locales. Moreover, *qāḍī* courts were still functioning in Muslim princely states, such as Bhopal and Hyderabad. These authors cautioned Muslims to make sure that the verdicts of state *qāḍīs* complied with the principles and particulars of the divine norms. Otherwise, they warned, such verdicts had no legal effect. Nonetheless, for Thānvī and his fellow authors, such state *qāḍīs* sufficed to solve the marital problems faced by Muslim men and women. The real problem existed where the colonial state had not employed Muslim *qāḍīs*.

In such contexts, Thānvī and his disciples argued, Muslims could not rely on non-Muslim judges to resolve matters pertaining to marriage and divorce.²⁸ According to such orthodox jurists, testimonies of non-Muslim witnesses carried no weight in adjudicating the domestic matters of Muslims.²⁹ Moreover, in legal scenarios where juries delivered the final verdict, all members of the jury had to be Muslim. The presence of a single non-Muslim juror invalidated the verdict of a jury otherwise consisting of Muslims.³⁰ We can see how Thānvī's legal guidance upheld social norms and attitudes that were designed in the political context of imperial Islamdom. Given these legal sensibilities, how did

²⁶ Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājiza*, 29.

²⁷ Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājiza*, 32.

²⁸ Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājiza*, 33.

²⁹ Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājiza*, 33.

³⁰ Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājiza*, 34.

Thānvī and company answer the demands of justice for the “helpless” and “oppressed” Muslim woman?

Like other Deobandīs and most Indian Sunnīs, Thānvī was steeped in the Ḥanafī School. For the Ḥanafīs, a helpless wife was fundamentally stuck in her tragic marriage without her husband’s enunciation of the divorce statement or a *qāḍī*’s verdict. Indian Ḥanafīs had eschewed borrowing the legal positions of other Sunnī Schools of law that outlined additional divorce procedures. In their deliberation on the problem of “the helpless wife,” Thānvī and his disciples departed from the dominant self-containment of their legal tradition by borrowing from the Mālikī School.³¹ The Mālikīs allowed local communities to appoint consultation groups, which consisted of at least three righteous members of the community, to resolve legal matters in the absence of *qāḍīs*. According to the Mālikī position, a marriage could be annulled against the husband’s desire through two stratagems: a consultation group’s decision or a *qāḍī*’s verdict (as opposed to the Ḥanafī position, which relied solely on the *qāḍī*’s verdict).

Before addressing the key issues at stake, the text discussed the procedure involved in legal amalgamation (*talfīq*), which the Ḥanafīs permitted in matters of “extreme social necessity” (*ẓarūrat-i shadīda*). The word, *talfīq*, means concoction or fabrication, but also invention or patching together. In Islamic legal terminology, *talfīq* implies “combining elements of one opinion from various quarters within and without the school.”³² It is erroneous to think that *talfīq* undermines the authority of Sunnī legalism. If anything at all, *talfīq* is an internal security measure, to ensure that reform or revision

³¹ Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājjiza*, 34.

³² Wael B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 117.

within legalism stays within the bounds of the established schools of Sunnī jurisprudence. Nonetheless, Thānvī and his fellow authors spent considerable time justifying their deployment of *talfīq*. These authors argued that neither a layperson nor a low-ranked religious scholar had the right to exercise this type of eclecticism in legal opinions: “The opinions of laypersons are not valid; laypersons are not permitted to borrow legal positions from other schools. We need to be extremely cautious in such matters.”³³ They argued that only learned and devout experts of the divine norms were permitted to amalgamate various perspectives from different schools.

In Deobandī orthodoxy, legal reform could only take place by means of predetermined internal security measures of the law schools. Traffic between such entrenched schools was only possible when piety-observant legal experts were doing the driving. For scholars such as Thānvī, adhering to such protocols was essential; deference to legalism ensured orthodox scholars’ discursive and social authority. In other words, legal reform within Muslim orthodoxy could only take place within the constraints of a fixed procedural structure. Thānvī, like countless other Sunnī jurists in colonial India, was overwhelmingly committed to the “proper” procedures of interpreting the legal canon.

This text’s ethical imperative (securing women’s marital rights) was tied to the preservation of procedural legal logics. Arguably, the question of women’s rights was an ancillary concern for Thānvī and like-minded legal experts. What really mattered was safeguarding the internal coherence and the societal relevance of legalism, which guaranteed the authority of the ‘*ulamā*’ to interpret divine norms and subjugated ordinary

³³ Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājiza*, 34.

Muslims to such interpretations. Thānvī's attention to women's rights, and his appeal for reform in marital laws, took place within the confines of such legalist loyalties and structures. In order to understand the provisions and pitfalls of Thānvī's positions on relations and rights between men and women, we have to grasp his legalist logics and juristic procedures. Deobandīs inherited these logics and procedures from centuries of strict adherence to Ḥanafī legalism in South Asia.

Muslim jurists such as Thānvī saw themselves as inheritors of a long-standing legal tradition, which subjugated them to earlier authorities as it endowed them with the authority to interpret their inherited discursive tradition. Thānvī was not alone in adhering strictly to Ḥanafī legalism. Barelvī scholars also embodied similar modes of fidelity to Ḥanafī legalism. Deobandīs and Barelvīs strictly followed Ḥanafī law to the letter. Such legal conservatism, they argued, was necessary in order to preserve the classic formulations of received sacred law, their direct link to the Prophet's normative practice. For many scholars, the classical luminaries of the Ḥanafī School lived during the first four centuries of Islamic history, roughly from the seventh century through the tenth century of the Common Era. Sunnī traditionalists of colonial India argued further that to mix and match various legal positions was tantamount to following one's whims and self-serving interests. The themes of "caution" and "extreme necessity" were surface effects of their desires to conform to established norms, to obey past authorities, and to feel at-home in genealogies transcending their historical location. Thānvī joined many of his Sunnī contemporaries in adhering to this "caution," which was an affective logic through which one belonged to a venerable legal genealogy. It is important to keep in mind this point about affective attachment to legalism, for it explains why Thānvī and his fellow

authors scrupulously justified their “legal amalgamation” before deploying the latter hermeneutic to solve the problem at hand.

The text then examined legal positions on Muslim women’s rights to petition for divorce in *qāḍī* courts or through consultation groups. Thānvī and his disciples first discussed the case of “the impotent husband” (*‘anīn*). The *‘anīn* was a husband incapable of performing sexual intercourse with his wife due to the following impediments to penile erection: disease, physical weakness, old age, or bewitchment.³⁴ In cases where a man retained the ability to perform sexual intercourse with some women but not with others, his legal status as either potent or impotent was contingent on the woman in question. Thānvī and company argued that the wife had the right to petition for divorce if her husband’s impotency was established after the passing of a full year. The text detailed the complicated legal procedure deployed to determine a husband’s impotency. A wife’s petition to divorce an impotent husband was granted only after legal authorities had inspected him, judged him to be truly impotent, and a year had passed since this judgment in which his condition remained the same.

Thānvī and his fellow authors followed a similar line of reasoning with reference to husbands who suffered from mental disability (*junūn*). They acknowledged that according to Ḥanafī master-jurists Abū Ḥanīfa and Abū Yūsuf, the woman who was married to a madman (*majnūn*) did not have the right to petition for divorce. Contrary to the position of these two luminaries, later Ḥanafīs preferred the position of the third member of the Ḥanafī master-jurist triumvirate, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī. For Shaybānī, the wife had the right to divorce in cases where the husband’s insanity became

³⁴ Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājiza*, 43.

unbearable and posed the threat of physical violence. Thānvī and company expressed affinity with Shaybānī's position, but clarified that his position, too, required meeting the following conditions: (1) before the marriage the wife had no knowledge of the husband's insanity; (2) she had not expressed "contentment" with her marital arrangement after finding out that her husband suffered from mental disability; (3) she had abstained from initiating sexual contact with him after knowing about his mental disability (as her sexual contact with him indicated "contentment in action"); (4) the insane husband had been given a full year in order to verify that his insanity was permanent and not temporary (a position they took from Mālikī law); (5) when his permanent insanity was established after the passing of a full year, the wife then had the right to terminate the marriage, but the act of divorce had to take place in a *qāḍī* court or within the meeting of a consultation group.

The text outlined similar positions with reference to the missing husband (*mafqūd*) and the husband who was unable to provide for his family. In such discussions, Thānvī and his fellow authors detailed complicated legal procedures, which they argued were essential conditions curtailing women's agency (as they had expressed fear of giving women absolute freedom). At times, the legal reasoning of these Indian jurists was more conservative than the reasoning of classical, medieval, and early modern Muslim jurists.

The Conjugal Economy of Religious Identity

The issue of apostasy sparked the public debate addressed by *The Successful Stratagem*. How did apostasy affect the marriage contract? An appendix to *The Successful Stratagem* addressed this important question. Authored by Thānvī's disciple,

Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘, this concise appendix was titled, *Ḥukm al-azdawāj ma‘a ikhtilāf dīn al-azwāj* (*The Ruling on Marriage in Cases of Spousal Religious Difference*).

The Ruling on Marriage framed the question of apostasy in a broader legal discourse about religious identity and conjugality. Were Muslims permitted to marry non-Muslims? Could a Muslim woman remain married to a husband who had abandoned Islam altogether and identified as non-Muslim? While *fiqh* specialists answered these questions in the language of legalism, we cannot ignore the political implications of their answers. These legal formulations responded to a crisis of Muslim identity in colonial India. As mentioned above, some Muslim intellectuals felt embarrassed at the apostasy cases of Muslim women who deployed this strategy to exit their unwanted marriages. These cases of apostasy have to be seen in relation to Christian missionary and Hindu *shuddi* activities in late colonial India. This is why *The Ruling on Marriage* addressed not only the effects of apostasy on marriage contracts, but the entire gamut of questions relating to religious identity and marriage.

Shafī‘ first separated rulings pertaining to difference of religious identity preceding the *nikāḥ* from rulings about change of religious identity after the *nikāḥ*. He taught that under no circumstances could a Muslim woman marry a non-Muslim man, whether he was a *kitābī* non-Muslim (Jew or Christian) or a non-*kitābī* non-Muslim (Hindu, Sikh, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, atheist, etc.). The Muslim man, on the other hand, had the legal permission to marry a non-Muslim woman as long as she was a *kitābiya* (Jew or Christian). However, the marriage of a Muslim man to a *kitābiya* had to fulfill two conditions. First, the *kitābiya* had to belong to mainstream Judaism and Christianity. As the author elaborated, “she cannot be a nominal Christian [or Jew], like the ordinary

people of Europe, who in reality no longer follow a religion. She should at least believe in the foundations of her religion, even if she does not observe religious rituals in daily life.”³⁵ Second, she had to be a Jew or Christian from the beginning, and not an apostate who abandoned Islam and converted to these religions. A Muslim man’s *nikāḥ* was valid with a *kitābiya* when these two conditions had been met.³⁶ However, without an “extreme necessity” it was undesirable (*makrūh*) for a Muslim man to marry a *kitābiya*. The author stated that the Prophet Muḥammad’s second successor, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, had forbidden Muslim men to marry Jewish or Christian women. The text quoted the example of ‘Umar from Shaybānī’s *Kitāb al-Athār* and noted that Ibn ‘Ābidīn had also emphasized this caution regarding marriage with the *kitābiya*.³⁷ The text further stated that marital relations with contemporary Europeans was not appropriate, as they could lead Muslims to the “destruction and ruination of religion and worldly life.”³⁸

We next read about the effects of changing one’s religious identity after the *nikāḥ*. Shafi‘ discussed the pertinent rulings by examining four scenarios. First, the *nikāḥ* between a non-Muslim husband and wife remained valid when both of them converted to Islam. Second, the *nikāḥ* of a Muslim husband and wife also remained valid when both of them became apostates. The third and fourth scenarios were more complicated and involved cases in which one spouse converted to Islam while his or her marriage partner remained a non-Muslim (the third scenario) or instances of apostasy (the fourth scenario).

³⁵ Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājjiza*, 104.

³⁶ Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājjiza*, 104.

³⁷ See Muḥammad Amīn b. ‘Umar b. ‘Ābidīn, *Hashiyat Ibn ‘Ābidīn: Radd al-Muḥtār ‘alā al-Durr al-Mukhtār*, ed. Husām al-Dīn b. Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Farfūr (Damascus: Dār al-Thaqāfat wa’l-Turāth, 2000): 8:150.

³⁸ Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājjiza*, 104.

In both scenarios, the rulings regarding the husband differed from those regarding the wife. I explain both in greater detail below.

If the husband became Muslim and his *kitābiya* wife maintained her religious identity, their *nikāḥ* remained intact. If she changed her religious identity from Jew to Christian or vice versa, their marriage was still valid. However, if she changed her religious identity from *kitābiya* to Zoroastrian or Hindu, for example, then their *nikāḥ* was cancelled. If the wife was Zoroastrian or Hindu to begin with, then the ruling pertaining to this case was contingent on whether the couple resided in *dār al-islām* (literally, “the abode of submission,” but referred to contexts where Muslims could resolve their legal problems by recourse to juridical institutions that recognized Islamic law) or *dār al-ḥarb* (literally, “the abode of war,” but referred to contexts wherein Islamic law wielded no judicial authority). If the couple resided in *dār al-islām*, a *qāḍī* counselled the wife, explaining to her the merits of Islam. If she accepted Islam after receiving counsel, then the couple’s *nikāḥ* remained valid. However, their *nikāḥ* became void if she refused to convert to Islam or remained silent in response to the *qāḍī*’s counsel. If the couple resided in *dār al-ḥarb*, the wife was allowed a respite equivalent to three menstruation periods. Their *nikāḥ* was void if she had not converted to Islam during this time period.

The resolution was simpler in cases where the wife became Muslim and the husband remained non-Muslim. If the couple resided in *dār al-islām*, the *qāḍī* encouraged the husband to convert to Islam. Their *nikāḥ* remained intact if the husband followed the *qāḍī*’s counsel. However, if he refused to do so or remained silent, then the *qāḍī* had the right to dissolve their *nikāḥ*. If the couple resided in *dār al-ḥarb*, the wife had to endure a

waiting period equivalent to three menstruation cycles. The couple's *nikāḥ* remained valid if her husband converted to Islam within this duration, otherwise it was void.

Finally, we read about cases involving apostasy. Shafi' first dealt with the simpler rulings pertaining to the husband's apostasy (as opposed to the more complex rulings on the wife's apostasy). When a married Muslim man became an apostate, his *nikāḥ* to a Muslim woman became null immediately. The dissolution of their marriage did not need to be approved by a *qāḍī*. If the husband became an apostate before the consummation of the marriage, then he owed his wife half of the promised financial gift (*mahr*), and she was not required to complete the waiting period called *'idda* (equivalent to three menstruation cycles). However, if he embraced apostasy after the consummation of the marriage, then the wife was required to complete the *'idda* duration and he owed her the full payment of the *mahr*. Moreover, he was responsible for her maintenance expenses (*nafaqa*) during *'idda*.

The wife's apostasy was more complex. At the outset, Shafi' acknowledged an internal perspectival difference between the Ḥanafīs. The Ḥanafī School outlined three rulings on the wife's apostasy. According to the first perspective, her apostasy immediately nullified the *nikāḥ*, after which she was to be incarcerated and pressured to revert to Islam and renew her *nikāḥ* with her former husband. Shafi' stated that this option required the authority of the state, and could not be applied where political commitments to Islamic law and *sharī'at*-compliant governmental structures were non-existent. According to the second perspective, a woman's apostasy does not nullify her marriage. The apostate woman (*murtadda*) remained in the care of her husband, though with the stipulation that all sexual relations with her were impermissible until she

reverted to Islam. This perspective had its origins in central Asian Ḥanafī jurisprudence (the central Asian jurists had added the stipulation regarding abstinence from sexual intercourse during this time period). The third position was attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa, who held that a Muslim woman's apostasy turned her into a concubine and thus the *murtadda* became her husband's property (*milk*). As with the first position, Shafi' underscored that the implementation of Abū Ḥanīfa's position, too, was impossible in the Indian context, where Muslims no longer possessed the power (*quwwat*) to enforce such regulations. The only feasible solution to the problem of a Muslim woman's apostasy was the second perspective, namely, the ruling of central Asian jurists such as Abū Naṣr al-Dabūsī. Thus, Shafi' concluded his *fatwa* by arguing that a Muslim woman's apostasy did not nullify her marriage; she continued to belong to her husband, although their conjugal relations could only continue when she reverted to Islam. Shafi' seemed not to acknowledge how this position, too, posed problems in the British Indian context. Moreover, he seemed to embrace the contradiction between the Qur'ānic verse, "Do not marry a polytheist woman until she becomes a believer," and the central Asian ruling according to which the wife's apostasy and possible polytheism did not affect the marriage. Without acknowledging that his position was wrought with contradictions, Shafi' held that while the apostate wife remained married to her husband, the couple would have to renew their *nikāḥ* when the wife finally reverted to Islam. This tension exemplified how Deobandī jurists embraced strategies and tactics beset by legal contradictions when they found themselves adhering to legal formulations grounded in imperial Islamdom. In effect, Shafi' took away from Muslim women the legal loophole of apostasy by insisting on a legal position that did not render *nikāḥ* void due to apostasy.

Shafi‘ completed *The Ruling on Marriage* in June 1933 and included signatures of approval from *fiqh* specialists from the following Deobandī educational institutions of colonial India: Madrasa Imdād al-‘Ulūm (Thana Bhawan), Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband, and Madrasa Mazāhir al-‘Ulūm (Saharanpur). Along with his signature, Thānvī remarked, “All of these commandments are sound.”³⁹ The other signatories included: Muftī ‘Abd al-Karīm, Zafar Aḥmad ‘Usmānī, Sirāj Aḥmad Amrohī, Sayyid Aṣghar Ḥusayn of Deoband, Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī, Muḥammad Ibrāhīm of Deoband, Muḥammad Rasūl Khān Hazārī, and Muḥammad Zakariyya Kāndhlavī.

Conclusion

The Successful Stratagem demonstrates the transformation of Islamic law from ethical jurisprudence to juridical governmentality in colonial India. The Muslim woman and her legal rights constituted a discursive domain through which orthodox theologians and jurists entered colonialism’s structures of governmentality. Thānvī’s legal perspectives helped to enact the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act of 1939 and other policy changes in colonial India, including the U.P. Muslim Wakf Act of 1936, the Shari‘at Act of 1937, and the Kazis Act of 1941. These overlaps between the interests of Muslim traditionalists and the colonial state machinery shows how both sides—Muslim orthodoxy and the colonial state—resolved the woman question in light of broader socio-political impulses. Moreover, these overlaps illustrate Rachel Lara Sturman’s argument that the seemingly “secular” colonial state “deployed religious values and governed via religious norms in a variety of ways.”⁴⁰ Thānvī’s legal writings on Muslim women’s right

³⁹ Thānvī, *Al-Ḥīlat al-nājjiza*, 116.

⁴⁰ Rachel Lara Sturman, *The Government of Social Life in Colonial India: Liberalism, Religious Law, and Women’s Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 9.

to divorce formed a part of this scene of governmentality. In the following chapter, I examine Thānvī's ideas about communalism, nationalism, and political theology. The fact that the colonial state had begun to take seriously Muslim juridical interventions in the public sphere was telling of the growing strength of Muslim separatism in late colonial India. With the impending partition of India, Muslim separatist politics gained momentum in the 1930s and the 1940s. The next chapter therefore examines the role of Muslim orthodoxy in the communalist politics of colonial India.

Chapter 7. The Spectacle of Communal Politics: Separatism and Nationalism

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed increasing tensions between India's Muslims and Hindus. Lurking behind these tensions was the socio-political ideology known as communalism, which in this context referred to the transformation of religious difference into political difference.¹ Beginning in this time period, Muslim and Hindu no longer marked two religious orientations alone, but named concrete sociological groups with separate political agenda. This transformation can be traced back to the closing decades of the nineteenth century, when colonial administrators increasingly used religion for classifying their subjects. The colonial ideology of communalism was coupled with concrete policies and practices of governmentality, such as the creation of separate electorates for Muslims (as enacted by the Indian Councils Act of 1909).² Thus, British authorities treated Muslims and Hindus as distinct and mutually exclusive populations that had to be managed with divisive disciplinary tactics.

By the early twentieth century, many Hindus and Muslims began to see themselves in the shadow of colonial discourse: as members of *separate* communities. Many Muslims delinked themselves from their Indian origins and called for the creation of a separate homeland.³ However, many Hindus and Muslims objected to communalism, arguing that religion—Hinduism or Islam—should not be used to break up the Indian

¹ Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Sandria B. Freitag, *Collective action and community: public arenas and the emergence of communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). Also illuminating is Asma Barlas, *Democracy, Nationalism, and Communalism: The Colonial Legacy in South Asia* (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1995).

² Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 161.

³ There is a substantial body of scholarship on the Pakistan movement. For a rigorous and balanced account, see Venkat Dhulipala, *Creating a New Medina: State Power, Islam, and the Quest of Pakistan in Late Colonial North India* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

nation. In this vein, numerous Muslim intellectuals insisted that their collective identity was dual, based on a religion that transcended India but an ethnicity that was Indian. By the 1920s the diametrically opposing ideologies of Indian nationalism and separatism clashed in everyday life and in the domain of representational politics. Although non-violent resistance was the dominant mode of anti-colonial struggle, there were several violent clashes between Hindus, Muslims, and the colonial state during the three decades directly preceding the 1947 independence and partition of India.⁴

Scholarship on communalism, Muslim separatism, and nationalism in colonial India has largely focused on the political actors and discourses. More recently, however, scholars have begun to study how religious actors fostered these political ideologies and movements. The recent work of Prabhu Bapu and Barbara D. Metcalf illustrates the analytical purchase of turning to Hindu and Muslim *religious* activists and authors in order to understand the role played by *local* religious thought in the construction of communalism and nationalism.⁵ This chapter contributes to this historiography by studying Muslim separatism as a *theological* concept discussed and debated by North Indian orthodox Muslim scholars. To that end, I situate Thānvī's theological and legal writings on communalism in two distinct frameworks: Muslim political thought in South Asia and early twentieth century Indian politics. I thus study Thānvī's theology and

⁴ Colonialist violence on certain factions of the native population, especially the Amritsar Massacre of 1919 and the killings of thousands of Hindus and Muslims (by each other and by the colonialist state) in Mapilla in the early 1920s, contributed to the rise of communalist rhetoric and political mobilization toward that end. Gyanendra Pandey argues that the numerous clashes between Hindus and Muslims beginning in 1923 changed the political landscape of colonial India, making religion a decisive factor in the colonialist management of local populations.

⁵ Prabhu Bapu, *Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North India, 1915-1930* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); Barbara D. Metcalf, *Husain Ahmad Madani: The Jihad for Islam and India's Freedom* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009). Dhulipala's *Creating a New Medina* also integrates religious actors and thinkers in his historical reconstruction of Muslim separatism in late colonial India.

jurisprudence of Muslim sovereignty. Given that Thānvī articulated his positions within the terminological language of traditional theology and sacred law, it becomes hard to maintain that communalism was exclusively a colonial invention. Similar to the work of Bapu and Metcalf, my study of Thānvī's politics illustrates how local authors repurposed and translated ideas designed in colonialist discourse toward their own political and social ends.

Orthodox Political Strategies

Muslim thinkers in late colonial India espoused varying political understandings and programs. These ranged from nationalist anti-colonial struggles to communalist pacifism. Barbara Metcalf classifies three Islamic ideologies of state and society in late colonial India: Islamist, modernist, and traditionalist. The Islamist political ideology—as represented by the autodidact Muslim thinker Abū'l A'la Mawdūdī (1903-1979)—called for “a distinctive Islamic political structure that would order Muslims everywhere.”⁶ The modernist political ideology—as articulated in Muhammad Iqbal's prose and poetry—imagined Islam “as a moral language to counter the modern, territorially-based nationalism modelled by Europe.”⁷ The traditionalist political ideology—as theorized by the Deobandī Ḥadīth scholar Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī (1878-1957)—“simply minimized the state, expecting it to provide order and protection and to allow the cultural lives of communities, defined above all as religious communities, to govern themselves internally.”⁸ Thānvī's political thought was situated roughly within the traditionalist

⁶ Barbara Metcalf, “Imagining Muslim Futures: Debates over State and Society at the End of the Raj.” *Historical Research* 80.208 (May 2007), 287.

⁷ Metcalf, “Imagining Muslim Futures,” 292.

⁸ Metcalf, “Imagining Muslim Futures,” 287.

model, albeit he differed substantially from Madanī's particular political interpretations and actions (as this chapter will make explicit).

Thānvī understood political issues in light of procedural Ḥanafī jurisprudence. He defined his political categories and deliberated political action by recourse to sacred law. In his world, scholars of sacred law were responsible only for teaching and counselling politicians. The '*ulamā*' were not responsible for practicing the craft of politics. The '*ulamā*' were inheritors of prophetic wisdom, and like past biblical prophets, their social and political role was to guide their communities. Thānvī thus avoided participation in official governmental institutions, insisting that his counsel was effective only if he maintained a critical distance from the world of politics. In this way, Thānvī upheld the distinction between the religious sphere of counsel and the political sphere of administration.

The distinction between counsel and administration should not be confused with the post-Enlightenment division of church and state. The political establishment, for many Muslim theologians (orthodox and otherwise), should be inspired and guided by the theological establishment. We can call this model relationship between pious scholars and practicing politicians as "the prophetic political." According to this model, the political sphere concretized abstract theological and moral teaching.

"The prophetic political" was based on long-standing metaphysical assumptions about the social nature of the human being, as articulated within canonical Muslim sacred law and theology. The latter two discourses borrowed some of these assumptions from classical Islamic philosophy even as Muslim jurists and theologians refuted the priority given to philosophy over religion by classical Muslim philosophers such as Fārābī.

Thānvī invoked the prophetic political, envisioning for himself and his theological colleagues the important role of guiding instead of managing political institutions. We also find in Thānvī's writings sharp criticism of the Enlightenment political ideals of democracy and individual freedom, two concepts that did not resonate with the prophetic political.

My study of Thānvī's political teaching sheds light on the shape and content of Muslim orthodoxy in colonial India. Thānvī situated the *authentic* Muslim subject against the backdrop of a socio-political landscape beset with anthropological distinctions imposed by the colonial state but also sanctioned by local discursive traditions. These distinctions were not only organized around religion, but also pertained to racialized ethnicity, class, and caste. In the preceding chapters, I illustrated how Muslim orthodoxy gathered conceptual and societal force through particular reifications of knowledge, discipline, desire, domesticity, and legalism. This chapter investigates another important discursive and institutional node of orthodoxy: the domain of the political.

In colonial India, anti-colonial resistance largely defined the terms of the political, especially following the local uprisings of 1857. After 1857, orthodox theologians who gradually deployed "Deobandī" as their sectarian orientation, including Thānvī, adopted differing positions on direct political resistance to colonial rule. Within the ranks of Deobandī theologians, we can identify at least three political strategies: pragmatic pacifism, communalist anti-colonial struggle, and nationalist anti-colonial struggle.

Thānvī was the Deobandī scholar who best exemplified pragmatic pacifism, according to which Muslims did not require their own state machinery to embody sacred law and spirituality. Toward the end of his life, however, Thānvī showed lukewarm

approval for communalist anti-colonial struggle. Many of his followers, therefore, took an active part in the communalist campaign for the creation of Pakistan. No Deobandī scholar exemplified communalist anti-colonial struggle, in theory and in action, better than Thānvī's colleague, Mawlānā Shabbīr Aḥmad 'Usmānī (d. 1949).⁹ Thānvī and his associates gradually aligned themselves with 'Usmānī in the late 1930s and the early 1940s. This constellation of scholars opposed nationalist anti-colonial struggle, even if they avoided ad hominem attacks on Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī, the leading theological voice of nationalist anti-colonial struggle. Thus, no consensus regarding the ideal political strategy existed among Deobandī scholars in late colonial India.

Despite these internal differences between orthodox '*ulamā*', some critics assume that the demand for Pakistan was the teleological and logical conclusion of Muslim moral traditions.¹⁰ Farzana Shaikh argues that Deobandī '*ulamā*' were responsible for authoring the ideology of "moral superiority" that generated Muslim separatism.¹¹ Iqbal Singh Sevea, among others, challenges Shaikh's essentialist thesis. Sevea sums up the problems with her argument: "Islam is seen to provide a set of fixed political stipulations, hence no space is allowed for the interpretation of Islam"; (2) "Muslim intellectuals involved in propagating 'separatism' are seen to personify Islamic political ideology, whereas those who opposed the Muslim League or the demand for Pakistan...are portrayed as acting against the grain of Islamic political thought."¹² In addition to these two problems, I find

⁹ The definitive biography of Shabbīr Aḥmad 'Usmānī is: Muḥammad Anwār al-Ḥasan, *Kamālāt-i 'Usmānī, al-ma'rūf bihi Tajalliyāt-i 'Usmānī* (Multan: Idāra-yi Ta'lifāt-i Ashrafiyya, 2007).

¹⁰ Farzana Shaikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam: Muslim Representation in Colonial India, 1860-1947* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹¹ Shaikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam*, 118.

¹² Iqbal Singh Sevea, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 38.

problematic Shaikh's assumption that religious ideas, or in her parlance, "religious ideology," are relayed in political action without mediation and compromise.¹³ Shaikh relies on a realist, an almost deterministic, understanding of the relationship between ideas and actions.

The above-mentioned three Deobandī political strategies, namely pragmatic pacifism, communalist anti-colonial struggle, and nationalist anti-colonial struggle, emerged after the Rebellion of 1857. Before I address Thānvī's political strategy, it is important to summarize the history of traditionalist political thought in post-1857 Indo-Muslim culture. The next section thus summarizes how Deobandīs narrate the development of Muslim politics in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

Deobandī Historiography and Post-1857 Muslim Politics

The Revolt of 1857 was a decisive event in modern Indian history. British administrators used the expression, "The Mutiny of 1857," when speaking of a series of native revolts and skirmishes in 1857-58.¹⁴ While the original mutineers were Hindu and Muslim *sepoys* (soldiers) of the East India Company, some Muslim theologians used the tumultuous events to organize minor skirmishes against colonial forces.¹⁵ According to Deobandī historiography, Thānvī's ṣūfī master, Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh, and the latter's

¹³ Shaikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam*, 7.

¹⁴ There is a large body of historiographical literature on the so-called Mutiny of 1857. For a critical historical account, see Eric Stokes, *The Peasant Armed: The Indian Revolt of 1857*, ed. C.A. Bayly (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

¹⁵ A case in point was the Muslim theologian Muḥammad Faḥl-i Ḥaqq Khayrābādī (1798-1861 or 1862). The British authorities imprisoned him in the Andaman Islands following the Revolt of 1857, where he died in the early 1860s. While imprisoned there, Khayrābādī authored an Arabic account of the Revolt, which was later published as a bilingual edition (with Urdu translation) as: *Al-Thawrah al-Hindiyya: Bāghī-i Hindustān*, ed. and trans. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Shāhid Khān Shirwānī (Bijnor: Mawlawī Muḥammad Majīd Ḥasan [owner of the newspaper, *Madīna*], 1947). For its English translation, see S. Moinul Haq, "The Story of the War of Independence, 1857-58." *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 5.1 (January 1957): 23-57. See, also, the fourth volume of Sayyid Muḥammad Mīyan, *'Ulamā'-i Hind kā shāndār māzī* (Karachi: Maktaba-i Rashīdiyya, 1986).

disciples, Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī and Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī participated in some of these skirmishes.¹⁶ While the two disciples concealed their whereabouts in India until the Queen had issued a general pardon in late 1859, Ḥājji Imdād Allāh went into exile and eventually settled in the sacred Arabian city of Mecca.

The events of 1857 were followed by political despair, but also intellectual creativity.¹⁷ Muslim intellectuals intensified social reform activities and founded educational institutions. Some Muslim intellectuals were perturbed by the stereotypical image of “the backward Muslim,” a generalizing and dehumanizing colonialist formulation that was bound to generate the mixed reactions of apologetic opposition and strategic loyalty.¹⁸ In this context, Muslim scholars devised several counter measures to undo this colonialist projection of regressive subjectivity. Orthodox theologians reacted

¹⁶ According to Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī, three ṣūfī saints resided in the town of Thāna Bhawan during the 1857-58 uprisings: Ḥājji Imdād Allāh, Ḥāfiz Zāmin, and Shaykh Muḥammad Thānvī. In addition to being a ṣūfī, the latter was also a scholar of Muslim sacred law, whose judgments were trusted by Ḥājji Imdād Allāh and Ḥāfiz Zāmin. After the failure of a local anti-colonial uprising in Thāna Bhawan, these ṣūfīs deliberated the possibility of an armed offensive attack on local British loyalists and colonial forces. Shaykh Muḥammad Thānvī advised against taking any militant action, arguing that the group lacked adequate resources. Ḥājji Imdād Allāh and Ḥāfiz Zāmin were not persuaded by this judgment, and instead consulted the younger experts of Muslim sacred law, Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī and Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī. These two scholars recommended militaristic action. The group then appointed Ḥājji Imdād Allāh as their *amīr* and launched an offensive attack in the nearby town of Shamlī. Their efforts failed and Ḥāfiz Zāmin was killed during one of their skirmishes (see Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī, *Naqsh-i ḥayāt* [Karachi: Dār al-Ishā‘at, n.d.], 450-460). A detailed Deobandī monograph on this episode is Abū Salmān Shāhjahānpūrī, *Buzurghān-i Dār al-‘ulūm Deoband: Jihād-i Shāmlī 1857 awr ‘ulamā’-i Deoband kī siyāsī khidmāt ke dīghar pehlu* (Lahore: Jam‘iyya Publications, 2005). See also, Imdād Šābrī, *Sardār-i shahīdān: taẓkirah-yi Ḥaẓrat Ḥāfiz Muḥammad Zāmin Šāhib shahīd-i Farang* (Delhi: Šābrī, 1982). Based on the discrepancy between Deobandī historiography and general historical scholarship on 1857, it seems that Deobandī authors exaggerate the importance of the skirmishes at Shamlī. As Jamal Malik notes, “The reading of the ulama on this topic alone is...fraught with danger since there is exaggeration with regard to sacrifices they made and the numbers who became martyrs (*shuhada*) are increased” (*Islam in South Asia: A Short History*, 273).

¹⁷ On creativity of the ‘*ulamā*’ in this period, see Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁸ Sanjay Seth discusses the trope of “the backward but proud Muslim” in chapter 4 of his *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India* (Durham, NC. and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

against colonial rule by retreating to rural settings, where they devoted themselves to teaching *‘ilm-i dīn* to the next generation of Muslims.

The 1860s was a decade of anxiety and melancholia for orthodox Muslim theologians, who had to find ways to reinvent themselves in the colonial context. Nānautvī and Gangohī, among others, founded the Deoband *madrasa* in 1867, thereby channelling their religious zeal into teaching the rational sciences (*ma‘qūlāt*) and the traditional sciences (*manqūlāt*). While Gangohī taught Ḥadīth and counselled ṣūfī disciples in Gangoh, Nānautvī taught rational and traditional subjects at Deoband, wrote polemical treatises against the Shī‘a, and debated Christian missionaries and Hindu scholars.¹⁹ In his analysis of Nānautvī’s Shāhjahānpūr debate with Christians and Hindus, SherAli Tareen notes how Nānautvī’s rationalism and his use of terms such as history and religion were symptomatic of “the comprehensive socio-political alterations brought about by British colonialism in India.”²⁰ After 1857-58, theologians such as Nānautvī turned to intellectual and culture modes of resistance to British imperialism, aspiring to foster a new Muslim public in colonial India.

According to Deobandī historiography, orthodox scholars alone could construct the ideal public sphere. The *madrasa* at Deoband thus aimed to produce a generation of scholars who would breathe life into Muslim sociality, enabling Muslims to survive colonial rule. In this way, the *madrasa* gave institutional form to the anti-colonial political aspirations of Gangohī and Nānautvī. The primary political purchase of the *madrasa* was anti-colonial struggle. It was only later on that some Deobandī scholars,

¹⁹ SherAli Tareen, “The Polemic of Shahjahanpur: Religion, Miracles, and History.” *Islamic Studies* 51.1 (2012), 61.

²⁰ Tareen, “The Polemic of Shahjahanpur,” 63.

such as Thānvī, endorsed Muslim separatism. Nānautvī ha no qualms about Hindu-Muslim political solidarity against the British Raj. According to the Deobandī historian Manāẓir Aḥsan Gīlānī (1892-1956), local Hindus were among the *madrassa*'s beneficiaries. Moreover, the doors of the budding *madrassa* were open to non-Muslim students (and some even enrolled to learn subjects such as Galenic medicine and logic).²¹ We can therefore understand how Nānautvī's chief student, Maḥmūd Ḥasan, did not oppose Hindu-Muslim political coalition.²²

Maḥmūd Ḥasan was one of the first graduates of the Deoband seminary.²³ After completing his theological training, he started teaching at Deoband in the late 1870s and rose to prominence within orthodox circles as a superb Ḥadīth teacher and an avid political activist. According to one of his biographers, Maḥmūd Ḥasan led an ascetic life, devoting his time to reading, writing, and teaching.²⁴ While he had a keen interest in Muslim political life, he did not engage in direct political action until the First World War. In 1915, he accompanied some of his students on a pilgrimage to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. In these Western Arabian cities, he sought the help of Ottoman officials in order to deliberate and organize a local anti-colonial revolt in North India.

²¹ Manāẓir Aḥsan Gīlānī, *Sawānīḥ-i qāsimī ya'nī sīrat-i shams al-islām* (Lahore: Maktaba-i Rahmāniyya, 1980): 2:317; 2:333.

²² The chief biographies of Maḥmūd Ḥasan are: Sayyid Aṣghar Ḥusayn, *Ḥayāt-i Shaykh al-Hind: Imām al-'aṣr Ḥaẓrat Mawlānā Maḥmūd Ḥasan Deobandī* (Lahore: Idāra-i Islāmiyyat, 1977); Muftī 'Azīz al-Rahmān, *Tazkira-i Shaykh al-Hind* (Bijnor: Idāra-i Madanī, 1965); Iqbāl Ḥasan Khān, *Shaykh al-Hind Mawlānā Maḥmūd Ḥasan: ḥayāt aur 'ilmī karnamey* (Delhi: Sayyid Muḥammad Jāved, 1973). Maḥmūd Ḥasan's father, Zūlfiqār 'Alī, belonged to a *sharīf* family of Deoband. He received his theological training at the Delhi College under the mentorship of Mamlūk 'Alī. After completing his education, Zūlfiqār 'Alī accepted the position of "Inspector of Schools" in Bareilly, where Maḥmūd Ḥasan was born in 1851 (see Khān, *Shaykh al-Hind*, 115-117).

²³ He was one of the three scholars belonging to the first graduating class of this *madrassa*. The other two were Fakhr al-Ḥasan Gangohī and 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Pūrī (Sayyid Aṣghar Ḥusayn, *Ḥayāt-i Shaykh al-Hind*, 20).

²⁴ Sayyid Aṣghar Ḥusayn, *Ḥayāt-i Shaykh al-Hind*, 219.

Before anything of his political schemes could materialize, British authorities intercepted his communications (the episode was referred to as “The Silk Letter Conspiracy” in colonial records).²⁵ The incarcerated Maḥmūd Ḥasan and his Indian students were transported to Cairo. From there, they were sent to a prison camp in Malta until the end of World War I.²⁶ Maḥmūd Ḥasan returned to India in 1919, and spent the last year of his life exhorting Muslims to join anti-colonial struggle. He supported the Khilafat Movement and approved of Hindu-Muslim political coalition, calling it a form of public good (*maṣālaḥa*).²⁷

Thānvī did not support the Khilafat Movement (we discussed the context of this movement in “The Script of Subjectivity”).²⁸ He criticized this political formation for fostering friendship between Muslims and Hindus. Social and political unity, he argued, were contingent on ideological unity. According to Thānvī, an ideal Muslim possessed the truth (*ḥaqq*), while Hindus were folk of falsehood (*ahl-i bāṭil*). These two ideological categories—truth and falsehood—could not unite into a single entity without severe consequences for Muslims: “The unification of truth and falsehood often means that the truthful person is assimilated into falsehood.”²⁹ Thānvī assumed that truth was harder for

²⁵ On this episode, see Sayyid Muḥammad Mīyan, *Tahrīk-i Shaykh al-Hind* (Delhi: Al-Jamī‘at Book Depot, 1975). For its English translation, see Sayyid Muḥammad Mīyan, *Silk Letter Movement: Accounts of “Silk Letter Conspiracy Case” from British Records*, trans. Muhammadullah Qasmi (Deoband: Darul Uloom Deoband, 2013).

²⁶ The Indian theologians imprisoned at Malta included Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī, ‘Azīz Gul of Kaka Khel, Waḥīd Aḥmad Madanī, and Ḥakīm Nuṣrat Ḥusayn. The latter scholar died during the Malta imprisonment. See Sayyid Muḥammad Mīyan, *Asīrān-i Malta* (Karachi: Shamsī Publishing House, n.d.).

²⁷ Sayyid Aṣghar Ḥusayn, *Hayāt-i Shaykh al-Hind*, 226.

²⁸ For the most extensive monograph on this Movement, see M. Naeem Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). Qureshi’s thorough historical account does not replace an earlier critical analysis found in Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

²⁹ Mas‘ūd Aḥsan ‘Alawī, *Islāḥ al-muslimīn* (Lahore: Idāra-i Islāmiyyat, 1983), 513.

the individual to bear in relation to falsehood: “The person of falsehood is not incorporated into truth...this is so because truth is an arduous undertaking, for it opposes the ego [*nafs*], while falsehood is easy, for it agrees with the ego.”³⁰ He therefore argued that Muslims ought to abstain from all social and political unification with Hindus, for this coalition would eventually soil the purity of the Muslim subject.

Thānvī’s anti-Hindu rhetoric was part and parcel of his theology. Commenting on the Qur’ānic verse, “Your protecting friends are only God, His Messenger, and the believers” (5:55), he said, “Contemporary Muslims have fallen prey to a grave misunderstanding by taking non-Muslims to be their friends and by seeking protection from non-Muslims.”³¹ Thānvī acknowledge that political pacts and treaties with non-Muslims were sound Islamic practices. However, the type of political alliance demanded by the Indian National Congress troubled him. This particular alliance, he argued, erased important doctrinal and sociological distinctions between Muslims and non-Muslims. He thus adamantly opposed political alliance between Muslims and non-Muslims: “As long as we believe in Islam, all non-believers are our enemies, regardless of their white or black skin tones.”³² In this context, “white” referred to the English, while “black” referred to Thānvī’s non-Muslim countrypersons. This reading is further supported by another passage from his recorded discourses: “All non-Muslims are in fact the enemies of Islam. Whether they are white or black, they are snakes. The black snake is more poisonous than the white snake. Even if you throw out the white snake from your house, the black snake is still here to bite you. It is hard to stay alive after the black snake’s

³⁰ ‘Alawī, *Islāh al-muslimīn*, 513.

³¹ ‘Alawī, *Islāh al-muslimīn*, 516.

³² ‘Alawī, *Islāh al-muslimīn*, 516.

bite.”³³ Thānvī’s use of the snake image is beset with racialized language, associating blackness with Hinduism.³⁴

Thānvī’s politicized invocation of the image of the snake can be contrasted with Gandhi’s following words: “If I seem to take part in politics, it is only because politics encircles us today like the coil of a snake from which one cannot get out, no matter how much one tries. I wish therefore to wrestle with the snake.”³⁵ For Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, the snake was “the cleverest animal under the sun.”³⁶ Both Thānvī and Gandhi recognized something clever, or rather cunning, about the snake. While both Indians distrusted secular politics, they outlined opposing strategies for the colonized subject. English and Hindu ways had no place in the house of Islam, argued Thānvī. He chose the strategy of doctrinal and cultural separatism to maintain the purity of the Muslim subject. Gandhi, however, used the image of the snake as a motif for the political, which for him required counter-cunning measures. One of these measures was deploying the rhetoric and action of Hindu-Muslim unity in opposition to the British imperial ideology of “divide and rule.” In this way, Gandhi conceived of religion as a great resource for political strategy.³⁷ Thānvī harshly criticized Gandhi’s political strategy.

³³ ‘Alawī, *Islāh al-muslimīn*, 517.

³⁴ The evidence that black and white referred to Hindu and British persons, respectively, is present in Thānvī, *Ifādāt-i Ashrafiyya dar masā’il-i siyāsiyya*, 11.

³⁵ Mahatma Gandhi, *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi: Civilization, Politics, and Religion*, ed. Raghavan Iyer (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 42.

³⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 22.

³⁷ As Gandhi said, “I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means” (Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* [Boston: Beacon, 1993], 504). Nicholas B. Dirks points out how this assumption of Gandhi is only possible within the conceptual frame of colonial modernity: “Religion and politics could only be separated, or combined, once they were constituted in modern registers as discrete fields of belief and action” (*Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* [Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001], 299). For a compelling

Thānvī used harsh language with reference to Gandhi: “This idol [*tāghūt*] has evil intelligence, evil intentions, evil understanding, and evil religion. He is an open enemy of Islam and Muslims.”³⁸ While the word, “idol,” adequately translates the Qur’ānic word *tāghūt*, this word also means “leaders of the unfaithful.”³⁹ By dubbing Gandhi *tāghūt*, Thānvī invoked a powerful imagination of hostility, for *tāghūt* referred to the Prophet Muḥammad’s opponents and enemies. Apart from appeal to revelation, Thānvī also deployed classical philosophy to denigrate Gandhi: “From the beginning of this movement, some of us clearly understood that he [Gandhi] was an enemy of Muslims. How can a person who is not friends with himself, for he cannot determine what is in his best interest, give wise and advantageous counsel to others?”⁴⁰ Thānvī’s definition of friendship is clearly Aristotelian: “Perfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good, and alike in excellence; for these wish well alike to each other *qua* good, and they are good in themselves.”⁴¹ Gandhi, according to Thānvī, was no friend of Muslims. A true friend recognized good for himself and for his friends. The good, for Thānvī, was nothing but his own religion. He therefore argued that Muslims could not take non-Muslims to be their friends, as the two groups presupposed divergent visions of the good. While he couched his criticism of Hindu-Muslim alliance in Islamic terms, it is easy to see how Thānvī’s politics served the colonial political ploy of “divide and rule.”

account of Gandhi’s political philosophy, see Faisal Devji, *The Impossible Indian: Gandhi and the Temptation of Violence* (London: Hurst, 2012).

³⁸ Thānvī, *Malfuzat-i Hakim al-ummat*, 5:189.

³⁹ Stefania Cunial, “Spiritual Beings.” *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*. General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe. Brill Online, 2014. DUKE UNIVERSITY. 08 October 2014. <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/spiritual-beings-EQSIM_00402>

⁴⁰ Thānvī, *Malfuzat-i Hakim al-ummat*, 5:187-88.

⁴¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156b8-10, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonthan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2:1827.

Politics in Muslim Orthodoxy

In late colonial India, the Independence Movement mobilized several strategies of civil disobedience, from symbolic forms of resistance to material and economic boycott. One of the major strategies of the Independence Movement was Hindu-Muslim political alliance. The coming together of Hindus and Muslims to oppose colonial rule and to demand an independent India countered the colonial logic and practice of “divide and rule.” Thānvī opposed anti-colonial struggle and unhesitatingly assumed a distinct Muslim nation whose politics had to be disciplined. In Thānvī’s discursive and experiential worlds, the domain of politics was the final object of reform (*iṣlāḥ*). A key object of this reform was Hindu-Muslim alliance and friendship, which Thānvī ultimately condemned as a spiritual malady. Muslims had to re-learn and re-enact political persuasions and actions in order to make their political character comply with orthodox teachings. Thānvī therefore judged contemporary politicians’ opinions and actions within the conceptual and prescriptive framework of orthodox discursive traditions.

Politics (*siyāsat*), explained Thānvī, was essentially made up of two parts: the divine norms (*aḥkām shar‘iyya*) and practical institutions and procedures (*tadabīr tajribiyya*).⁴² Scholars of Muslim sacred law—the *fuqahā* and the ‘*ulamā*’—were responsible for teaching Muslims the divine norms regarding their political institutions and problems: “We consistently and emphatically teach legal chapters on the *siyar* [jurisprudence of statecraft and relations with non-Muslims], which is a part of the *sharī‘a* and no Muslim scholar is ignorant of this knowledge [of *siyar*].”⁴³ Thānvī

⁴² Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, “Risāla daf‘ ba‘ḍ al-shubuhāt ‘alā al-siyāsiyāt min al-āyāt.” In Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Al-Badā‘i*, ed. Muftī Jamīl Aḥmad Thānvī (Lahore: Kutub Khāna Jamīlī, n.d.), 52.

⁴³ Thānvī, “Risāla daf‘ ba‘ḍ al-shubuhāt ‘alā al-siyāsiyāt min al-āyāt,” 52.

understood the *siyar* to be chiefly a theoretical and hypothetical discourse on the laws of governance, especially legal guidance pertaining to war and relations with non-Muslims. His legal tradition, the Ḥanafī School, had much to say about this discourse, which had its origins in the *Kitāb al-siyar* of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī (d. 804 or 805).

Practical political institutions and procedures, however, were much more complex. As Thānvī explained, “This part of politics constantly changes according to circumstances, events, and types of weaponry, and so on, and is not included in the *sharī‘a*.”⁴⁴ Scholars of Muslim sacred law, therefore, were not responsible for mastering the craft of politics. Thānvī hastened to add, “This does not mean that it is entirely unrelated to the *sharī‘a*, nor does it imply that its practitioners do not require the guidance of the *‘ulamā’*.”⁴⁵ He explained that nothing in this world was outside the jurisdiction of the *sharī‘a*, even if it was not a part of the *sharī‘a*: “The fact that [everyday] politics is not a part of it does not necessarily imply that it is not regulated by it.”⁴⁶ In order to underscore this point, he analogized the politicians’ dependence on the *‘ulamā’* to the relationship between a patient and a physician. The latter prescribed all sorts of medicinal cures in order to cure the patient. While scholars of sacred law lacked expert familiarity with the science of medicine (*ṭibb*), they were still authorized to judge particular ingredients of a prescribed cure according to Muslim dietary laws. Likewise, scholars of sacred law were authorized to judge the legal status of political actions and tactics. In Thānvī’s dream world, even if the scholarly elite did not know how to operate

⁴⁴ Thānvī, “Risāla daf‘ ba‘ḍ al-shubuhāt ‘alā al-siyāsiyāt min al-āyāt,” 52.

⁴⁵ Thānvī, “Risāla daf‘ ba‘ḍ al-shubuhāt ‘alā al-siyāsiyāt min al-āyāt,” 52.

⁴⁶ Thānvī, “Risāla daf‘ ba‘ḍ al-shubuhāt ‘alā al-siyāsiyāt min al-āyāt,” 52.

the political machinery, they could still turn off its switch if this machinery failed to manufacture the desired goods.

On the one hand, politicians were required to consult scholars of sacred law regarding the legality of political actions and tactics. Scholars of sacred law, on the other hand, had to rely on politicians for the knowledge of everyday politics. Thānvī then cited the example of the biblical prophets and biblical kings: “rulers sought counsel from the prophets; rulers obeyed the prophets whose responsibility was to guide them and to assist them in maintaining order (*nizām*).”⁴⁷ This was the ideal model of mutual cooperation between the religious and the political elites. However, this model did not flourish in colonial India, where experts of sacred law inhabited a discursive and sociological world largely independent of officialdom. In this context, Thānvī argued, “scholars should form a group within themselves, consisting of *sharī‘a* experts and *siyāsa* practitioners”⁴⁸

Thānvī wrote short but succinct treatises on political thought and action. His disciple and spiritual successor Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘ collected these treatises in a collection titled *Ifādāt-i Ashrafiyya dar masā’il-i siyāsiyya* (*Political Matters according to the Teachings of Mawlānā Thānvī*).⁴⁹ In his preface to the volume, Muḥammad Shafī‘ briefly but insightfully discussed the context of Thānvī’s political teaching. This salient preface sheds lights on the various issues at play in pre-partition Muslim politics from the perspective of Thānvī and his followers. For Thānvī, political questions could only be answered in the context of legalism, for politics was a branch of applied sacred law (*fiqh*).

⁴⁷ Thānvī, “Risāla daf‘ ba‘ḍ al-shubuhāt ‘alā al-siyāsiyyāt min al-āyāt,” 54.

⁴⁸ Thānvī, “Risāla daf‘ ba‘ḍ al-shubuhāt ‘alā al-siyāsiyyāt min al-āyāt,” 54.

⁴⁹ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Ifādāt-i Ashrafiyya dar masā’il-i siyāsiyya*, ed. Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘ (Deoband: Dār al-Ishā‘at, 1945)

Muḥammad Shafī‘ described Thānvī as a careful thinker, especially in matters concerning theology and the interpretation of sacred law. Thānvī exercised firm caution when dealing with contentious theological and legal questions (*masā’il ikhtilāfiyya*). Thānvī’s judgment and positions sought to safeguard the boundaries (*hudūd*) of the tradition, argued Muḥammad Shafī‘. The latter saw Thānvī’s caution as a model for legal scholarship, and pointed out that his ṣūfī master postponed judgment on contentious political questions until he had pursued sustained study and dialogue with other theologians. He accepted the counsel of others and had no qualms about changing his mind in light of new information. At the same time, he did not waver from his theological and legal positions once his research and dialogue had yielded satisfactory results. By painting Thānvī in this way, Muḥammad Shafī‘ deployed Thānvī’s image as esteemed jurist in order to bolster the latter’s credentials as a serious political thinker. On my reading, by painting Thānvī in this manner Muḥammad Shafī‘ also dismissed certain associations of his ṣūfī master with renunciation of the world and anti-political temperament. Thānvī, in this rendering, was a sober thinker capable of methodical reflections on political issues.

For Muḥammad Shafī‘, Muslims in South Asia were involved in two “righteous objectives” (*maqāṣid ṣaḥīḥa*) in the aftermath of the First World War. First, Muslims sought to preserve the Ottoman Empire, which for them was the last symbol of Muslim sovereignty. Second, they sought to end Britain’s colonial hold on their homeland and live in an independent India. Thānvī, according to Muḥammad Shafī‘, did not object to these two political desires. Instead, Thānvī objected to and criticized certain political positions on two levels: the question of method and the legality of certain political

strategies. For Thānvī, rational and scriptural norms ought to govern a political vision in terms of procedure (methods) and practice (strategies).

Muḥammad Shafī‘ then explained the rationale behind Thānvī’s particular political positions. Even though Thānvī had a penchant for “ascetic solitude” (*derwāyshī yaksūī*), noted Muḥammad Shafī‘, he nonetheless carried an aching heart for the worldly affairs of Muslims. He was especially troubled by the actions of those Muslims who had joined the Indian National Congress, which was to his mind a Hindu political organization.⁵⁰ He worried that companionship with non-Muslims in such political coalitions would weaken and alter Muslim religious thought and practice. At the beginning, Thānvī did not pronounce any judgment about the legal status of Muslim participation in Congress activities, as some of his fellow theologians from Deoband had expressed support for Hindu-Muslim political alliance (and had joined the ranks of the Congress). It was out of respect for them that Thānvī kept his dislike for Hindu-Muslim alliance to himself at the beginning. At the same time, he issued his non-binding legal opinions (*fatāwā*) on particular political practices that contradicted the letter or the spirit of the revealed norms (*sharī‘a*).

In this preface, Muḥammad Shafī‘ also emphasized the contingent ground of politics: political action, he explained, always changed from theory to practice. With this insight, his readers could appreciate Thānvī’s changing perspectives. Thānvī took active initiative to condemn the politics of Hindu-Muslim alliance when the orthodox theologians associated with the Congress started issuing *fatāwā* that required all Muslims

⁵⁰ For Thānvī’s fatwa on Congress, see Thānvī, *Imdād al-fatāwā*, 4:614.

to rally behind the Congress. Thus, Thānvī's legal condemnation of alliance with Congress was a counter-strategy. With a treatise titled, *Tanzīm al-muslimīn* (*The Organization of the Muslims*), Thānvī issued public statements on Muslim politics. He sent a list of questions to the Jamī'at al-'Ulamā'-yi Hind, the main organization of orthodox theologians supporting the Congress, and their opponents, the secular-educated politicians of the Muslim League. Through these inquiries, he requested both sides to state their political positions in clear terms.

According to Muḥammad Shafī', Thānvī received satisfactory replies from the Muslim League, but did not receive any answers from the Jamī'at al-'Ulamā' (despite sending them several reminders to answer his letters). The latter organization was unwilling to conduct a political-theological debate with Thānvī on these matters. Thānvī's support of the Muslim League and condemnation of the Congress therefore resulted out of this failed attempt at dialogue and reconciliation. At the same time, Thānvī acknowledged the shortcomings of the Muslim League, especially in its leadership's lack of religiosity. However, this blemish could be ameliorated with counsel and consultation with reliable orthodox theologians, a task for which he appointed several of his close associates and disciples. This group of theologians sought to educate the secular leadership of the Muslim League—these theologians were known in Thānvī's circle as “the assembly inviting to the truth” (*majlis-i da'wat al-haqq*)—and attempted to steer the religious consciousness of the Muslim League toward Thānvī's orthodox teaching.

In this way, orthodox theologians could be political while staying outside of concrete politics. This was Thānvī's general teaching on the relationship between theologians and politics. Thānvī's pragmatic pacifism was deeply rooted in his

understanding of the social role of orthodox religious scholars (*'ulamā'*). The *'ulamā'* continued the legacy of God's prophets: the teaching of God's commandments. Even though the prophets were in touch with the world for executing this purpose, they were independent of the world. The *'ulamā'*, too, were both inside and outside of secular reality. The *'ulamā'* were responsible for reforming the ways of the world, and therefore had to stand at a position from where they could observe social reality in objective terms. Standing at a secular threshold, the *'ulamā'* neither abandoned the world altogether nor participated in the political full-heartedly. For Thānvī, political weather changed daily and politicians were men of all seasons. Thānvī explained that the *'ulamā'* could not afford to inhabit the political, as lay Muslims did not have the capacity to distinguish a person's politics from his or her religion. Zaman sums up Thānvī's position quite adequately: "The 'ulama's calling was likewise not to assume political roles—as of his [Thānvī's] Deobandi colleagues had done—but to offer religious guidance to the people."⁵¹ The treatises edited and collected by Muḥammad Shafī' furnished Muslims with this sort of pastoral guidance, rooted in the prophetic political.

Thānvī's Jurisprudence of Politics

In *Al-Rawḍat al-nāḍira fī'l-masā'il al-ḥāḍira* (*The Glowing Garden: A Commentary on Contemporary Issues*), Thānvī treated twenty matters related to Indian politics, especially Muslim-Hindu alliance and traditional teaching on Muslims under non-Muslim rule. Thānvī wrote this treatise during the years of the Khilafat Movement (1919-1925). He employed technical vocabulary from Muslim sacred law (*fiqh*), leaving Arabic passages un-translated. This tells us something about his intended audience: he

⁵¹ Zaman, *Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi*, 52.

wrote solely for fellow *fiqh* specialists, perhaps hoping that they would first arrive at a consensus on Muslim politics before addressing these issues publicly. He arranged this internal conversation under two headings: positions (*masā'il*) and proof-texts (*dalā'il*). The first type of entries detailed positions on particular political issues, while the second type of entries furnished citations from canonical sources of Ḥanafī *fiqh*.

Thānvī began by acknowledging that the defense of “Islamic dominion” (*salṭanat islāmiyya*) and “the visible markers of Muslim identity” (*sha'ā'ir al-Islām*) is obligatory on Muslims. On his account, the idea of *salṭanat islāmiyya* included both the Caliphal state (*khilāfa*) and the non-Caliphal state (*ghayr khilāfa*). He noted that this obligation was sometimes collective (*farḍ kifāya*) and at times individual (*farḍ 'ayn*). This position went unchallenged by his contemporary Muslim theologians. Thānvī's gloss on this position, however, was where he differed from some of his colleagues, namely those who advocated direct political confrontation with colonial rule.

According to Thānvī, the obligation to defend Muslim sovereignty and Islamic identity was contingent on certain conditions, which he claimed had been fully elaborated in the canonical works of the Ḥanafī School. The first condition for this obligation, he explained, was “capability, not in the literal sense, but in the terminology of the *sharī'a*.”⁵² For Thānvī, Muslims did possess the capability for revolutionary action in the literal sense of the word, but they were not capable of anti-government action in terms defined by the *sharī'a*. The latter not only considered a person's physical capacity for action, but also measured whether one was able to properly defend oneself in the face of further retaliation from the government.

⁵² Thānvī, *Ifādāt-i Ashrafiyya dar masā'il-i siyāsiyya*, 10

Thānvī further asserted that when faced by real danger, the very obligation of defensive *jihād* was invalidated.⁵³ The invalidation of obligation (*suqūt al-wujūb*), however, was not the same as the “non-existence of permissibility” (*‘adm al-jawāz*). Thus the question arose: was it permissible for Muslims to fight the British in active combat? To this question, Thānvī offered a complicated answer. Scholars of sacred law, he argued, could offer three possible answers to this question: (1) active combat is impermissible; (2) active combat is permissible; (3) active combat is not only permissible, but also preferable (*mustaḥabb*). For Thānvī, any one of these three answers was not a conclusive religious mandate, but a matter of independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) and informed opinion (*ra’y*). Judgments about the issue of *jihād* were therefore discretionary and thus lacked the textual authority required to call *jihād* mandatory. Thānvī further argued that scholars could differ not only in terms of these three positions, but also in terms of theoretical and practical considerations. A scholar could judge that combatting British armies was theoretically *mustaḥabb*, but disapprove of actual combat because of practical considerations or assessments of Muslim strength and the danger of incurring harm from the enemy. In support of this position, Thānvī cited passages from the *Al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyya* and Ibn ‘Ābidīn’s commentary on Haṣkafī’s *Al-Durr al-Mukhtār*.

Thānvī also opposed those Muslim theologians who called for non-cooperation and the economic boycott of the British. He argued that such strategies were not a part of defensive *jihād*, but instead consisted of “strategies of resistance” (*tadābīr-i muqāwamāt*), which were merely permissible (*mubāḥ*) and not mandated by the

⁵³ Thānvī, *Ifādāt-i Ashrafiyya dar masā’il-i siyāsiyya*, 10.

sharī'a.⁵⁴ He argued that no scholar of sacred law had the right to obligate Muslims to participate in strategies of active resistance, such as economic boycott of the colonial state. This was so because juridical judgments of this sort reflected a scholar's independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) and not explicitly stated divine obligations (*wājibāt maqṣūda shar'īyya*). The issue of active anti-colonial resistance was therefore open to discussion and debate.

Friendship with non-Muslims was another issue Thānvī tackled in this treatise. He taught that all forms of genuine friendship (*muwālāt-i ḥaqīqī*) with non-Muslims were forbidden. This ruling, he argued, applied equally to the non-Muslim living in a Muslim state (*dhimmī*), the non-Muslim living in non-Muslim states (*ḥarbī*), the combatant or brigand non-Muslim (*muhārib*), and the peaceful non-Muslim (*musālim*). All non-Muslims, “whether white or black,” were included in this ruling.⁵⁵ Thānvī was not interested in Hindu-Muslim friendship and disapproved of the political strategies employed by the Congress. When asked about the Islamic legal teaching on civil disobedience, he replied: “All such activities are legally impermissible. Muslims should not participate in these actions.”⁵⁶ He explained that the Qur'ān commanded Muslims to avoid self-injury: “Cast not yourselves to destruction with your own hands [i.e. by means of your actions]” (Qur'ān 2:195).

In addition to friendship, civil relations (*mudārāt*) with non-Muslims were also prohibited. However, these relations were prohibited when pursued for one's personal gain or pleasure. Civil relations with non-Muslims were permissible and encouraged

⁵⁴ Thānvī, *Ifādāt-i Ashrafiyya dar masā'il-i siyāsiyya*, 10.

⁵⁵ Thānvī, *Ifādāt-i Ashrafiyya dar masā'il-i siyāsiyya*, 11.

⁵⁶ Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, “Mu'āmalat al-muslimīn fī mujādalat ghayr al-muslimīn,” In *Ifādāt-i Ashrafiyya dar masā'il-i siyāsiyya*, ed. Muftī Muḥammad Shafī' (Deoband: Dār al-Ishā'at, 1945), 26.

when embodied for preventative measures (as a means to prevent harm from non-Muslims) or when embodied in order to attract non-Muslims toward converting to Islam (*tawaqu‘-yi hidāyat*). These relations were also permissible with a non-Muslim who was physically weak and required assistance.

Apart from *muwālāt* and *mudārāt*, Thānvī also treated another set of relations known as “acts of kindness” (*mu‘āsāt*). It was permissible for Muslims to act kindly toward non-Muslims who were either *dhimmī* or *musālim*, but not with reference to the *ḥarbī* or the *muḥārib*. However, there were exceptions that made it permissible to show kindness to the *ḥarbī* and the *muḥārib*. These exceptions included, explained Thānvī, showing them kindness in dire circumstances when their life was in danger and “when doing kindness to them was favorable to [the image of] Islam or when it is hoped that they would convert to Islam.”⁵⁷

Taken together, these rulings illustrate a crisis of categories in Islamic legalism. The central binary around which these laws were organized was that of *dār al-ḥarb* (“land of war”) and *dār al-islām* (“land of submission”). These two categories described the “legal status” of a territorial polity in classical Islamic law. Some jurists, including Thānvī, went into great detail to argue that a territory governed by non-Muslims could be considered *dār al-islām* with the caveat that this territory’s Muslims could peacefully practice their religious rituals. Muslim jurists started rethinking India’s legal status following the dissolution of the Mughal Empire. Some Muslim jurists and theologians issued *fatāwā* that identified India as *dār al-ḥarb*, while others considered it *dār al-islām*.

⁵⁷ Thānvī, *Ifādāt-i Ashrafiyya dar masā’il-i siyāsiyya*, 11.

For Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, post-1857 India was “land of war” (*dār al-ḥarb*). Gangohī articulated this in a lengthy *fatwā* titled, *Fayṣalat al-a‘lām fī dār al-ḥarb wa dār al-islām* (*Decision of the Renowned Scholars: An Investigation of the Land of War and the Abode of Submission*).⁵⁸ Gangohī acknowledged a difference of opinion in the determination of the legal status of a territory such as colonial India, which was previously ruled by Muslims (and had once been *dār al-islām*) but was now ruled by non-Muslims, namely, the British. Gangohī traced the difference of opinion in this matter to the three foundational figures of the Ḥanafī School: Abū Ḥanīfa, Abū Yūsuf, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī. For the latter two authorities, the establishment, with considerable prestige and social authority, of the Islamic judicial system was the only criterion to claim that a conquered Muslim state remained *dār al-islām*. These two authorities held that a Muslim state conquered by non-Muslims could remain *dār al-islām* only if the conquering non-Muslim power did not interfere with the legal institutions of Islamic law, including Islamic law courts. Abū Ḥanīfa, however, added to this stipulation an additional couple of conditions. First, the conquering non-Muslim state had to share a geographical border with the conquered Muslim state. Only this sharing of borders (*ittiṣāl*) guaranteed full control. If there was a Muslim state between the conquering non-Muslim state and the conquered Muslim state, then the conquered Muslim state was to retain its status as an “abode of submission,” for theoretically the neighboring Muslim state was responsible for restoring Muslim sovereignty to the Muslim state conquered by non-Muslims. Second, Abu Ḥanīfa taught that even if non-Muslim control over a Muslim province or state became absolute, it was possible to consider the conquered state *dār al-*

⁵⁸ See Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Ta’līfāt-i Rashīdiyya* (Lahore: Idāra-i Islāmiyyat, 1996): 653-668.

islām if there were enough prestige and recognition of the Islamic way of life among the local population.

Gangohī ultimately judged that India was not *dār al-islām* but a “land of war.” In order to make this decision, however, he did not deploy the position of Abū Yūsuf and Shaybānī. Instead, he remained faithful to Abu Ḥanīfa. Gangohī explained that it was obvious to any observer that Indian Muslims did not have recourse to the institutions of Islamic law, the Islamic way of life did not enjoy prestige in colonial India, and the lack of geographical borders between India and Great Britain was inconsequential given that Abu Ḥanīfa stipulated this condition in light of the annexation of Muslim villages and cities by non-Muslim states and not global empires. Thānvī, however, argued that colonial India was *dār al-islām*.

Debating Thānvī’s Politics in Post-Colonial South Asia

Thānvī’s teaching on politics continued to be debated in modern South Asia. A case in point was the debate between two Pakistani Deobandī scholars that unfolded in the 1990s. In his 1990 book, *Mawlānā Ubayd Allāh Sindhī ke ‘ulūm wa afkār (An Intellectual Biography of Mawlānā Ubayd Allāh Sindhī)*, the Pakistani Deobandī scholar ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Sawātī (1917-2008) used the word, “zero,” to describe the political activity of Thānvī and his disciples.⁵⁹ For Sawātī, Thānvī and his followers “did not have the capacity to oppose the cunning and deceptive power of the British.”⁶⁰ Thānvī and his disciples, argued Sawātī, were *sharī‘a*-minded ṣūfīs whose religious lives were limited to “writing *fatwas* and composing religious books; teaching, lecturing, and sermonizing; and

⁵⁹ ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Sawātī, *Mawlānā Ubayd Allāh Sindhī ke ‘ulūm wa afkār* (Gujranwāla: Idāra-i Nashr wa Ishā‘at, 1990; 2007), 127.

⁶⁰ Sawātī, *Mawlānā Ubayd Allāh Sindhī*, 127.

counselling and disciplining disciples through formal initiation.”⁶¹ Sawātī’s criticism was illustrative of internal tensions among Deobandī scholars over political action. While Thānvī was skeptical of radical political action in British India, other Deobandī scholars embraced anti-colonial political struggle. The key luminaries of the latter group included Thānvī’s Ḥadīth professor, Maḥmūd Ḥasan (1851-1920), and the latter’s more politically active students Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī and ‘Ubayd Allāh Sindhī (1872-1944). It was the latter’s intellectual ideas that formed the basis of Sawātī’s 1990 book.⁶²

Sawātī’s characterization of Thānvī did not go unchallenged within Deobandī circles. Muḥammad Taqī ‘Usmānī (born 1943), a Karachi-based Deobandī jurist and Ḥadīth scholar, swiftly rebutted Sawātī’s critical remarks. ‘Usmānī’s father, Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘, and ṣūfī master, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy ‘Ārifī, were two of Thānvī’s spiritual successors (*khulafā’*). Defending his biological and spiritual fathers, ‘Usmānī argued that Sawātī had mystified Islam’s true political character. ‘Usmānī associated Sawātī’s position with Islamist thinkers who had erroneously understood Islam to be a mode of governance and a political theology.⁶³ ‘Usmānī explained that Thānvī understood religion and politics to be interlinked but ultimately separate spheres of action. ‘Usmānī traced Thānvī’s political position to the foundations of the classical Islamic tradition: “Mawlānā Thānvī’s position was based on the practical teachings of the Qur’ān, the Prophet’s example (*sunna*), and the way of the rightly-guided Caliphs. His views were also firmly

⁶¹ Sawātī, *Mawlānā Ubayd Allāh Sindhī*, 127.

⁶² Wit his 1990 book, Sawātī intended to provide a corrective to popular depictions of ‘Ubayd Allāh Sindhī as a socialist revolutionary who endorsed muddled ideas about religious pluralism.

⁶³ For example, the Islamist political theologian, Abū’l A‘lā Mawdūdī (1979).

situated within traditional and rational discourses.”⁶⁴ For ‘Usmānī, Thānvī understood the political as merely a means to achieve the higher ends of religion: “Politics is a means and religion is the primary objective, but this does not mean that politics is unnecessary. It means that we should know the priority of religion over politics. Religion is an end in itself, while politics are only a means of actualizing religion.”⁶⁵ For Thānvī and his disciples, the political was excluded from the essence of religion, which these scholars defined as a set of metaphysical beliefs and salvific practices.

Thānvī argued that Muslims did not require state institutions in order to embody piety. He drew the map of religion not on terrestrial territory, but on the soulful body of the believer. Other Deobandī theologians, however, emphasized the world in which a soulful body could thrive. For Maḥmūd Ḥasan, British colonialism was the greatest hindrance to Muslim social and religious survival and success. Maḥmūd Ḥasan saw nothing wrong with participating alongside his Hindu countrypersons in order to overthrow colonial rule.

To Thānvī’s mind, Hindu-Muslim political coalition negated the sovereignty of Islam and the purity of Muslim subject. The Muslim body politic, for Thānvī, could not get mixed up with the Hindu body politic: “Remember that external unity has a great impact on spiritual unity. The nation (*qawm*) that lacks external unity also lacks spiritual unity. This is why the Prophet Muḥammad, God’s peace and blessing be upon him, prohibited Muslims from imitating the un-believers (*tashabbuh bi’l-kuffār*).”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Muḥammad Taqī ‘Usmānī, “Ḥakīm al-Ummat ke siyāsi afkār,” in *Islām awr siyāsat*, ed. Muḥammad Ishāq Multānī (Multan: Idāra-yi Ta’līfāt-i Ashrafiyya, 1998), 24.

⁶⁵ ‘Usmānī, Ḥakīm al-Ummat ke siyāsi afkār,” 29.

⁶⁶ ‘Alawī, *Islāh al-muslimīn*, 504.

Thānvī explained that Maḥmūd Ḥasan’s investment in Hindu-Muslim coalitionist politics—or *ishtirāk*—made sense only in the context of the Khilafat Movement.⁶⁷ For Thānvī, Maḥmūd Ḥasan approved of Hindu-Muslim coalitional politics for the greater public good (*maṣālaḥa*) of the Muslims.⁶⁸ Thānvī explained that after Maḥmūd Ḥasan’s death in 1920, Hindu-Muslim coalitionist politics merged together with Congress under Gandhi’s leadership. Thānvī distinguished this political formation from Maḥmūd Ḥasan’s coalitionist politics, claiming that it was no longer a matter of *maṣālaḥa*, but had become an instance of Muslim submission (*mutāba‘a*) to Hindu leadership.⁶⁹ Thānvī thus condemned the Hindu-Muslim political alliance preached and practiced by Madanī and Sindhī.

Conclusion

Deobandī scholars outlined and inhabited competing political imaginaries: pragmatic pacifism, communalist anti-colonial struggle, and nationalist anti-colonial struggle. On my reading, their various political positions all implied an active political subject. Deobandī *‘ulamā’* appropriated the discourses on “divine governance” (*siyāsa shar‘iyya*) and engaged classical *fiqh* in order to address their contemporary political concerns.⁷⁰ For Thānvī, political questions were also theological and legal questions. Tradition—in the form of theology and sacred law—provided guidelines regarding the ideal mode of governance and relations between rulers and their subjects. Yet, politics

⁶⁷ Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Shaqq al-ghayn ‘an ḥaqq ‘Alī wa Ḥusayn* in *Bawādir al-nawādir* (Lahore: Idāra-i Islāmiyyat, 1985): 815-818.

⁶⁸ Thānvī, *Shaqq al-ghayn*, 818.

⁶⁹ Thānvī, *Shaqq al-ghayn*, 818.

⁷⁰ An excellent, though dated, overview of *siyāsa shar‘iyya* is found in Fauzi M. Najjar, “Siyasa in Islamic Political Philosophy.” In *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani*, ed. Michael E. Marmura (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984): 92-110. This book chapter discusses both the political thought of early Muslim jurists as well as that of Muslim philosophers.

and theology were two separate sciences governing related but ultimately distinct domains of human concern and action. As mentioned above, the political was ultimately tied to this world, while the theological transcended secular affairs in order to outline the way to eschatological salvation. Thānvī followed the classical division of theology and politics that dubbed the former a theoretical science and the latter a practical science. This division enabled him to subjugate the political to the theological. God's revealed law, in this case, provided guidance for practical (i.e. rational) political action. Thānvī, therefore, did not shy away from *thinking* matters political, judging them in light of the Islamic legal categories of permissible, obligatory, and impermissible.

In conclusion, Thānvī inhabited “the prophetic political,” a political theology he deployed to justify his brand of politics. Although other pro-Muslim League orthodox ‘*ulamā*’, such as Shabbīr Aḥmad ‘Usmānī, were committed to communalist anti-colonial resistance, Thānvī’s brand of communalist politics privileged the strategy of pragmatic cooperation with the British over anti-colonial resistance. He explicitly stated: “The conclusion we can draw from present-day political realities in India is that people should demand the protection of their rights (*ḥuqūq*) while remaining subservient to the laws of the present government.”⁷¹ Thānvī had thus made his peace with British colonialism and its governmental practices in India. He insisted that the political arena was not the proper stage for the performance of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy could survive in non-state spaces, such as *ṣūfī* lodges, mosques, seminaries, and domestic spaces. Moreover, orthodoxy possessed alternative sources of power, such as charisma and pastoral care.

⁷¹ Quoted in Rānā Muḥammad Ashraf, *Ḥaḡrat Ḥakīm al-ummat awr unke khulafā’ kī siyāsī khidmāt kā tafṣīlī jā’iza* (Bahawalnagar: Idāra-yi Ta’līfāt-i Ashrafiyya, n.d.), 24.

Conclusion: The Power of Orthodoxy

In British India, Muslim traditionalism lived through colonial modernity in multiple configurations, from elite modernism to shrine-based devotionism to ultra-scriptural conservatism. This dissertation did not study these three configurations, but concentrated on a fourth iteration of the Muslim tradition, namely orthodoxy: the community of seminary-educated scholars who actively debated the content of doctrine and ritual by recourse to traditionalist authority (*taqlīd*) and prophetic normativity (*sunna*). By analyzing the prolific literary production of a single orthodox theologian and mystic of British India, namely Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, this dissertation has contributed to the burgeoning literature on orthodox Muslim traditionalism in colonial modernity. I demonstrated the survival of Muslim orthodoxy by looking at its conceptual tensions and the strategies deployed by orthodox theologians to inhabit and persist in these tensions.

Tension indicates movement, the vital sign *par excellence*. But life has no meaning without death, which always haunts the organism, most importantly from within.¹ The idea that tradition is autoimmune—that it protects itself from itself, for it encompasses not only constructive elements but also destructive ones—serves the

¹ The notion of autoimmunity is another name for what the German philosopher Hegel understood by “contradiction” (although my understanding of autoimmunity is equally informed by Freud, especially as understood through Derrida). In *The Science of Logic*, Hegel deployed a certain understanding of the structure of temporality in order to explain that double negation was the general condition for the possibility of motion: “Something moves, not because at one moment it is here and at another there, but because at one and the same moment it is here and not here, because in this ‘here’, it at once is and is not” (G.W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller [Atlantic Highlands, NJ.: Humanities Press International, 1989], 440). For Hegel, that X is here and not here at the same time was illogical because it negated the law of contradiction; however, the very fact that it is here and not here at the same time was the only condition of possibility for its existence within space-time. It followed from this that “motion is existent contradiction itself” (*The Science of Logic*, 440). Hegel thus preceded Derrida in claiming that contradiction, or autoimmunity, characterized essentially all life in itself: “Something is therefore alive only in so far as it contains contradiction within it, and moreover is this power to hold and endure the contradiction within it” (*The Science of Logic*, 440).

interests of religious folk in multiple ways. First, this notion reinforces collectivity and flock consciousness, for it takes a community to survive. Second, it emphasizes the need for a spiritual guide who embodies tradition's life-giving elements and displaces its death drive. Third, it posits tradition as a living organism that struggles with internal and external tensions and challenges.

Orthodoxy is the name of tradition's triumphalist survival. It is tradition's emergence as a reified vital force that can reproduce itself and become something other than the original. The life of orthodoxy depends on strategies of survival and tactics of thriving. In colonial India, orthodox authorities deployed particular strategies to manage and resolve tradition's internal tensions. Thus, the key strategies and tensions elaborated in this dissertation included: *religious knowledge* (moral responsibility and gnostic insight), *self-discipline* (passion and reason), *sublimation* (sensuality and divinity), *regulation of gender* (ornamental femininity and essential masculinity), *legal reform* (equality and difference), and *pragmatic pacifism* (separatism and nationalism). The charismatic folk of South Asian Muslim orthodoxy, such as Thānvī, deployed these strategies to reify and reproduce tradition. In so doing, they embodied a particular brand of power. What is this form of power and how did orthodox authorities tap into it?

Let me turn to Thānvī's recorded conversations to answer this question. On the morning of 24 December 1932, he shared this aphorism with his disciples: "Teacher and student are like father and son, for their relationship is based on love. The master-disciple dynamic, however, mirrors a king and his subjects and does not require love."² In this aphoristic remark, the sage identified two sources of power: genealogy and sainthood.

² Thānvī, *Malfūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 9:30.

Thānvī was surely not the first Muslim thinker to analogize the ṣūfī master-disciple dynamic to royal sovereignty. The traffic between kingship and sainthood was more than an analogy in the history of Islamate South Asia. As A. Azfar Moin has shown, pre-modern Muslim kingship in India, as in Iran and central Asia, drew on the rich symbolic and social power of embodied sainthood: “This form of sainthood regulated the religious and social life of the period, in cities and towns, villages and pastoral communities, and courts and military encampments. As this saintly style of sacrality fused with kingship, it led to a new synthesis of practical politics and spiritual practices.”³ Thānvī thus invoked a longstanding legacy of saintly sovereignty. The bodies of his disciples were the territorial bases of his spiritual authority.

Thānvī also invoked a brand of authority grounded in love: the teacher-student relationship. Like a father cared for his biological offspring, a teacher cared for his intellectual progeny. Thānvī thus remarked, “Of my disciples, I am closer to those who have studied under me, for love characterizes this relationship.”⁴ The ṣūfī model of authority, built on charismatic sainthood, had run out of steam in Thānvī’s colonial context, for British power did not validate itself by means of this holy social institution. British rule brought another form of power to South Asia, namely what Michel Foucault calls “governmentality.”

Governmentality names a set of modern efficient practices devised to govern a population, itself a category invented to serve modern European states. The invention of “population” served the needs of governmental practices, as did the classifications states

³ A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 8.

⁴ Thānvī, *Malfūzāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, 9:30.

enacted within a population by recourse to class, race, sexuality, reproduction, health and hygiene, and so on. Each segment of the population was measured in relation to its ability to act efficiently. The idea of efficiency is important here, for liberal governmentality obeyed “the internal rule of maximum economy.”⁵ Historians of South Asia have documented the full-fledged flourishing of what Foucault calls “liberal governmentality” in colonial India.⁶

Thānvī’s *hundreds* of books, *hundreds* of disciples, *hundreds* of sermons, and so on, were produced within a colonial state defined entirely by its desire to maximize industry and economy. Moreover, scholars such as Thānvī imagined the socio-political management of India’s Muslims in ways comparable to colonial governmentality. At one place, Thānvī offered a solution to colonial India’s crisis of Muslim personal law: “Muslims should collectively appeal to the government to create *qāḍī* courts. Once these courts are established, Sunnīs can take their problems to Sunnī *qāḍīs*, Shī‘as can consult Shī‘a *qāḍīs*, and Qādiyānīs can go to Qādiyānī *qāḍīs*.”⁷ Thānvī invoked the notion of a unified Muslim population whose members petitioned the colonial state for self-governing courts. He further classified this Muslim population along sectarian lines. This statement captures how the ideology of governmentality interacted with extant notions of saintly and juridical forms of power in colonial South Asian Islam. However, it would be erroneous to think that charismatic sainthood was Islamic and governmentality was

⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*, ed. Michael Senellart and trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2008), 318.

⁶ Deana Heath, *Purifying Empire: Obscenity and the Politics of Moral Regulation in Britain, India, and Australia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); U. Kalpagam, *Rule by Numbers: Governmentality in Colonial India* (Lanham, MD.: Lexington Books, 2014); Mark Brown, *Penal Power and Colonial Rule* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014); Stephen Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi’s Urban Governmentalities* (Malden, MA.: Blackwell, 2007).

⁷ Quoted in Rānā Muḥammad Ashraf, *Ḥaḡrat Ḥakīm al-ummat awr unke khulafā’ kī siyāsī khidmāt kā tafṣīlī jā’iza* (Bahawalnagar: Idāra-yi Ta’līfāt-i Ashrafiyya, n.d.), 29.

Western. In fact, according to Foucault, governmentality had Abrahamic religious roots.

Foucault traced the roots of governmentality to the Hebrews and the Eastern Mediterranean practice and concept of shepherding flocks of sheep. He emphatically rejected any points of convergence between pastoral power and the city-state sovereignty of the Greeks and the imperial sovereignty of the Romans. Judeo-Christian pastoral power gradually displaced Greek and Roman brands of sovereignty in pre-modern Europe. Foucault's understanding of pastoral power merits examination, for it helps us appreciate how governmentality throws light on genealogy, the second source of power prevalent in Muslim orthodoxy.

On 8 February 1978 a flu-stricken Foucault brilliantly outlined for his audience the concept of pastoral power. "The shepherd's power," explained Foucault, "is not exercised over a territory but, by definition, over a flock, and more exactly, over the flock in its movement from one place to another."⁸ The bodies of believers made up the pastor's congregation, just as bodies of sheep—and not the land they grazed on—made up the shepherd's flock. Foucault cited a biblical proof-text to substantiate his claim about the Hebraic roots of pastoral power: "In your faithful love you led out the people you had redeemed; in your strength you have guided them to your holy pastures" (Exodus 15:13).⁹ Pastoral power was also "a beneficent power" (akin to a father's love for his son) and a "power of care."¹⁰ Foucault cited a rabbinic commentary, according to which God chose Moses because "he knew how to graze his sheep." God gifted him with the responsibility of leadership and said: "Since you know how to pity the sheep, you will

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, ed. Michael Senellart and trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2007), 125.

⁹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 126.

¹⁰ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 126-127.

have pity for my people, and I will entrust them to you.”¹¹ Care and compassion were at the heart of pastoral power, which “initially manifests itself in its zeal, devotion, and endless application.”¹² Finally, explained Foucault, pastoral power was wrought with a paradox: “the sacrifice of one for all, and the sacrifice of all for one,” an ideal that later figured centrally within Christianity.¹³

The survival of Muslim orthodoxy in colonial India—amidst increasing governmental practices of control—was possible because scholars such as Thānvī embodied multiple brands of power, saintly and pastoral, to tend to the Muslim population. Their flock was the Muslim population writ large: men and women, scholars and laypersons, highborn and lowborn. Thānvī’s discipline, asceticism and admonition, paralleled Victorian high formalism and colonial devices of population management. Orthodox strategies of survival encompassed the transformation of interiorized religion into a communal project of moral formation. Muslim orthodoxy was at once about the personal and the political. Sacred law and mysticism became sources of self-fashioning and blueprints for world-making.

While I concentrate on Muslim orthodoxy, I recognize the pressing need to invoke comparative frameworks wherever possible. Throughout the writing of this dissertation, the colonial formation of Hindu orthodoxy haunted me (as well as the formation of Jewish orthodoxy).¹⁴ I wondered, and sometimes posed questions to Leela

¹¹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 127.

¹² Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 127.

¹³ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 129.

¹⁴ A comparative analysis is needed in order to explore how Thānvī’s ṣūfī followers participated in the inter-religious polemics of colonial India. Thānvī’s successors (*khulafā’*) included scholars who took part in Hindu-Muslim public debates, such as Mawlānā Murtaẓā Ḥasan of Chandpur and Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Majīd. Thānvī sent the latter on proselytization trips, including trips to counter the *shuddi* (re-conversion of

Prasad, Laura Lieber, and Kalman Bland, if modern Jewish or Hindu orthodoxies also revolved around the themes of epistemic exclusivism, disciplined sense of personal responsibility, chastised affectivity, regulation of the private and public dimensions of gender, and theocratic nationhood? After all, Muslims and Hindus—but also Muslims and Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Christians, Jews, agnostics, and atheists—have shared a common spatio-temporal framework in South Asia for centuries. Moreover, traditional-minded Muslims and Hindus reacted to colonialism in comparable ways.

Jawaharlal Nehru observed the shared predicament of Hindus and Muslims under colonialism in his musings on world history, written for his daughter Indira Priyadarshini (Indira Gandhi): “Hindu law itself is largely custom, and customs change and grow. This elasticity of the Hindu law disappeared under the British and gave place to rigid legal codes drawn up after consultation with the most orthodox people...The Muslims resented the new conditions even more, and retired into their shells.”¹⁵ Nehru’s observation forestalled several scholarly studies on the transformation of Hindu and Muslim legal discourses in colonial India.¹⁶ The colonial context shaped profoundly the Hindu and Muslim experience of their pre-existing scholarly traditions. Hindu and Muslim orthodox

Muslims to Hinduism) movement spearheaded by the Arya Samaj leader Swami Shraddhanand (1856-1926). Murtaẓā Ḥasan authored a refutation of the Hindu doctrine of reincarnation: Murtaẓā Ḥasan, *Radd-i tanāsukh* (Muradabad: Afzal al-Maṭābi‘, n.d.). See Appendix IV for brief biographical notes on Murtaẓā Ḥasan and ‘Abd al-Majīd.

¹⁵ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History: Being Further Letters to His Daughter, Written in Prison, and Containing a Rambling Account of History for Young People* (London: Lindsay Drummond, 1942), 431.

¹⁶ Ebrahim Moosa, “Colonialism and Islamic Law,” In *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates*, eds. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Armando Salvatore, and Martin van Bruinessen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009): 158-181; Michael R. Anderson, “Islamic Law and the Colonial Encounter in British India,” In *Islamic Family Law*, eds. Chibli Mallat and Jane Connors (London, Dordrecht, and Boston: Graham and Trotman, 1990): 205-223; Michael R. Anderson, “Legal Scholarship and the Politics of Islam in British India,” In *Perspectives on Islamic Law, Justice, and Society*, ed. R. S. Khare (Lanham, MD. And Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999) 65-91; Scott Alan Kugle, “Framed, Blamed and Renamed: The Recasting of Islamic Jurisprudence in Colonial South Asia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 35.2 (2001): 257-313.

scholars opposed the social and intellectual changes provoked by colonialism, committing themselves to elaborating and embodying alternative ontological, epistemological, and ethical traditions.¹⁷

This dissertation has cast light on the various scenes—constructed but lived, performed but felt—of Muslim orthodoxy. My discussion of Thānvī’s ingenuity and industry, his teaching on discipline and domesticity, among others themes, has shown how Muslim orthodoxy happened at the everyday, ordinary level, where ideas and ideals encountered embodiment—scenes that were at once ephemeral and everlasting. I have argued that at the heart of Muslim orthodoxy in colonial India were the concepts and practices of religious knowledge, self-discipline, sublimation of desire, traditional gender norms, loyalty to legalism, and communal identity. My analyses of Thānvī the person and the archive were marked by both critique and compassion. In the end, I find it apropos to let one his survivors, namely his “official” biographer ‘Azīz al-Ḥasan Ghawrī, sum up the ṣūfī master’s legacy:

Absolute praise is due to God! With divine assistance, our revered elder, Mawlānā Thānvī, magnificently accomplished the task of reviving and illuminating Islam, the task for which God the Most High had sent him. He departed from us only after clearing the path, identifying the straight path for us to follow. In my humble opinion, we can honor our beloved master’s memory by practicing his teachings and counsels in our everyday lives with a zeal greater than before.¹⁸

¹⁷ My reading of survival is guided by Erik H. Erikson’s gloss on this same passage from Nehru. Erikson writes, “Thus, as we would say in therapeutic practice, whatever adaptive resilience there may have been now became defensive, and the defense often took the forms of either exaggerated compliance with or complete mistrust of those who, with superior force, introduced foreign ways into the ancient system” (*Gandhi’s Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1969], 272-73).

¹⁸ Ghawrī, *Ashraf al-sawānih*, 4:99.

Appendix I: Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī—A Timeline

1280/1863	Born in Thana Bhawan, United Provinces, British India
1295/1878	Enrolls at the Deoband Seminary to Study Classical and Medieval Texts
1300/1882	Corresponds with Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh
1300/1883	Graduates from the Deoband Seminary
1301/1883	Begins Teaching Career at Madrasa Fayẓ-i ‘Ām in Kanpur
1301/1884	Leaves India for his First Pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina; Thānvī and his father, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq, both become ṣūfī disciples of Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh
1302/1884	Returns to Kanpur, India
1308/1890	Intensifies Spiritual and Meditative Practices
1310/1893	Undertakes a Second Pilgrimage to Arabia and Undergoes Spiritual Training with Ḥājjī Imdād Allāh for Six Months in Mecca
1315/1898	Settles Permanently in Thana Bhawan
1316/1898	Experiences a Year of Anxiety
1317/1901	Publishes <i>Bihishtī zewar</i> (<i>Heavenly Ornaments</i>)
1326/1908	Publishes <i>Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur’ān</i> , a Major Urdu Translation and Commentary of the Qur’ān
1344/1926	Appointed as Chancellor (<i>sarparast</i>) of the Deoband Seminary
1354/1935	Resigns from the Chancellorship of the Deoband Seminary
1356/1937	Issues a Disparaging Fatwa on Muslim Participation in the Indian National Congress
1362/1943	Dies in Thana Bhawan

Appendix II: Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī’s Sermons (*khuṭbāt*)

This appendix provides information on the 32-volume edition of Thānvī’s sermons published by the Idāra-yi Ta’līfāt-i Ashrafiyya in Multan. Each volume is organized thematically.

Total Sermons: 332

Total Pages: 15,428

Khuṭbāt-i Ḥakīm al-ummat: A Thematic Overview

Volume 1: *Dunyā wa ākhirat* (The World and the Afterlife)—14 sermons; 523 pages.

Volume 2: *‘Ilm wa ‘amal* (Knowledge and Practice)—8 sermons; 400 pages.

Volume 3: *Dīn wa dunyā* (Religion and World)—10 sermons; 492 pages.

Volume 4: *Ḥuqūq wa farā’iz* (Rights and Responsibilities)—13 sermons; 528 pages.

Volume 5: *Milād al-nabī* (The Prophet’s Birthday)—9 sermons; 515 pages.

Volume 6: *Niẓām-i sharī‘at* (The Normative Order)—13 sermons; 518 pages.

Volume 7: *Ḥaqīqat-i ‘ibādat* (The Essence of Ritual Worship)—14 sermons; 514 pages.

Volume 8: *Ḥaqīqat-i māl wa jāh* (The Essence of Wealth and Glory)—10 sermons; 624 pages.

Volume 9: *Faẓā’il-i ṣabr wa shukr* (The Merits of Patience and Gratitude)—12 sermons; 638 pages.

Volume 10: *Faẓā’il-i ṣawm wa ṣalāt* (The Merits of Fasting and Ritual Prayer)—12 sermons; 460 pages.

Volume 11: *Ḥaqīqat-i taṣawwuf wa taqwā* (The Reality of Sūfism and Piety)—11 sermons; 560 pages.

Volume 12: *Maḥāsin al-Islām* (The Charms of Islam)—7 sermons; 504 pages.

- Volume 13: *Da‘wat wa tablīgh* (Preaching and Proselytization)—8 sermons; 456 pages.
- Volume 14: *Jazā wa sazā* (Reward and Retribution)—8 sermons; 438 pages.
- Volume 15: *Taslīm wa raḏā* (Submission and Contentment)—12 sermons; 470 pages.
- Volume 16: *Barakāt-i Ramḡān* (The Blessings of Ramaḡān)—11 sermons; 500 pages.
- Volume 17: *Sunnat-i Ibrāhīm* (The Way of Abraham)—13 sermons; 504 pages.
- Volume 18: *Mafāsīd-i ghunāh* (The Evil Causes of Sin)—14 sermons; 536 pages.
- Volume 19: *Āḡāb-i insāniyat* (The Moral Standards of Humanity)—12 sermons; 408 pages.
- Volume 20: *Huqūq al-zawjayn* (Marital Rights and Responsibilities)—10 sermons; 560 pages.
- Volume 21: *Tadbīr wa tawakkul* (Effective Management and Reliance on God)—12 sermons; 416 pages.
- Volume 22: *Zikr wa fikr* (Self-Contemplation and Remembrance of God)—11 sermons; 496 pages.
- Volume 23: *Rāh-i najāt* (The Path of Salvation)—10 sermons; 440 pages.
- Volume 24: *Mawt wa ḡayāt* (Life and Death)—7 sermons; 430 pages.
- Volume 25: *Hudūd wa quyūd* (Laws and Limitations)—8 sermons; 408 pages.
- Volume 26: *Iṣlāḡ-i a‘māl* (Reformation of Actions)—10 sermons; 574 pages.
- Volume 27: *Faḡā’il-i ‘ilm* (The Merits of Knowledge)—11 sermons; 536 pages.
- Volume 28: *Iṣlāḡ-i ḡāḡir* (Reformation of Exteriority)—10 sermons; 550 pages.
- Volume 29: *Iṣlāḡ-i bāṡin* (Reformation of Interiority)—11 sermons; 400 pages.
- Volume 30: *Khayr al-a‘māl* (The Best of Deeds)—15 sermons; 630 pages.
- Volume 31: *Raḡmat-i do‘ālam* (The Prophet Muḡammad: Mercy for Both Worlds)—6

sermons; 400 pages.

Volume 32: Table of Contents of the Preceding 31 Volumes

Summaries of Select Sermons:

Al-Murād—The Objective (Date and Place: June 1906 in Muradabad; Attendance: 5,000; Qur’ānic verse: 17:18-21) Summary: Nothing in itself is good or bad. The criterion for moral judgment is the intended objective of an act (*murād*). The same action can be good or bad depending on one’s intention. Thus, no action deserves praise/reward or blame/punishment without considering the underlying intention. Intentions alone merit praise or incur blame. However, God may pardon unintended blameworthy actions.

Al-Dīn al-khālīṣ—Pure Piety (Date and Place: November 1911 in Kanpur; Attendance: 1200; Qur’ānic verse: 39:11) Summary: The essence of “sincerity” (*ikhhlās*) involves God-serving and not self-serving motives. The method for acquiring *ikhhlās* is to engage in self-questioning before each act, to ask oneself: am I doing this action for God alone? If one doubts one’s sincerity, one should eradicate from one’s heart false, ego-serving motivations. The sermon included a section on the reality of “submissive incorporation into the divine” (*‘abdiyyat*) as well.

Tijārat-i ākhirat—Trade of the Afterlife (Date and Place: March 1912 in Saharanpur; Attendance: 2,000; Qur’ānic verse: 9:111) Summary: “Advancement” (*taraqqī*) is a beautiful word, but these days people take it to mean avarice and longevity of worldly aspirations. The divine norms (*sharī‘a*) denounce this type of *taraqqī*. The Prophet Muḥammad’s Companions only desired *taraqqī* that consisted of embodying the

salvation practices, which brought them their territorial victories and the glory coveted by contemporary Muslims.

Ittibā' al-munīb—Obedience to the Chosen (Date and Place: January 1913 in Lucknow; Attendance: 2,500; Qur'ānic verse: 31:15) Summary: An extended meditation on the Qur'ānic line, “And follow the way of those who turn to me” (31:15). Those who turn to God are the righteous scholars of religion, folk who embody the knowledge of the divine norms. Strict obedience to God and the Prophet Muḥammad's pristine model thus entails obedience to righteous Muslims. Qur'ānic message necessitates that Muslims follow a single school of sacred law (i.e. *taqlīd shakhṣī*), which alone can save Muslims from self-serving interpretations of scripture and tradition.

Al-Dunyā—The World (Date and Place: March 1914 in Thana Bhawan) Summary: Muslim women are to be praised for not doubting the message of God and the ways of the Prophet Muḥammad. Women readily accept what they believe to be divinely mandated; whether they act upon this belief is another matter. They will neither doubt nor question a religious doctrine or practice. Men, on the other hand, do not possess this submissive quality. Today's men are entirely slaves to their rational capacity/'*aql* (and sometimes their means of subsistence/*akl*). Men have become afflicted with the malady of seeking rational justifications and demand proofs and arguments for everything.

Gharīb al-dunyā—The Stranger of the World (Date and Place: September 1922 in Thana Bhawan; Attendance: 50) Summary: It is hard to belong and unbelong to this

world at the same time. Therefore stay *in* this world and do not fantasize the flight from your everyday realities. However, one should only relate to this world in terms of necessity, similar to how a traveller relates to the highway or the service station. In other words, find a middle ground between total abandonment and total absorption with respect to worldly existence.

Hamm al-ākhirat—Concern for the Afterlife (Date and Place: May 1927 in Thana Bhawan; Attendance: 30; Qur’ānic verse: 30:7). Summary: To desire the world is not blameworthy; rather, acting upon this desire deserves condemnation. Likewise, the pursuit of wealth is not forbidden. In fact, to some extent it is preferable to have wealth. There are different degrees of attachment to worldly life; some are necessary, others are unnecessary and a hindrance to achieving life’s true goal, the pleasure of God. The objective of the believer should be the love for God, which can be attained by remaining in the company of piety-bound sages.

Appendix III: Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī’s Recorded Conversations (*malfūzāt*)

The following collections of *malfūzāt* constitute the 31-volume edition published by the Idāra-yi Ta’līfāt-i Ashrafiyya in Multan, the edition that I have used in this dissertation.

Volumes 1-10

- *Al-Ifādāt al-yawmiyya min al-ifādāt al-qawmiyya*, compiled by various disciples of Thānvī (from 6 January 1932 to 27 September 1941).

Volume 11

- *Jadīd malfūzāt*, compiled by Mawlānā Muḥammad Nabīyuhu (1930-31?).

Volumes 12-13

- *Maqālāt-i ḥikmat* (also known by the title, *Da ‘wāt-i ‘abdiyyat*).

Volume 14

- *Fuyūz al-khāliq*, compiled by Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Khāliq (the author compiled this collection over five years during his month-long stays in Thānvī’s ṣūfī lodge during the month of Ramaḍān, years not given).
- *Kalimat al-ḥaqq*, compiled by Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq (1344 AH [1925-1926]).

Volume 15

- *Malfūzāt-i Aṭhar*, compiled by Mawlānā Aṭhar ‘Alī of Sylhet.
- *Mazīd al-majīd*, compiled by Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Majīd Bichranwī.
- *Fuyūz al-raḥmān*, compiled by Mawlānā Fuyūz al-Raḥmān (between 1937 and 1943).
- *Khayr al-ifādāt*, compiled by Mawlānā Khayr Muḥammad Jalandharī.

Volumes 16-20

- *Ḥusn al-‘azīz*, compiled by ‘Azīz al-Ḥasan Ghawrī (volumes 16 and 17); Munshī Rashīd Aḥmad Sanbhalī (volume 18); Mawlānā Muḥammad Yūsuf Bijnorī and Ḥāfīz Ṣaghīr Aḥmad (volume 19); Mawlānā Muḥammad Yūsuf Bijnorī and Mawlānā Muḥammad Mustafā Bijnorī (Volume 20). Volumes 16-17: 1915; Volume 18: 1917-1918; Volume 19: 1918-1919; Volume 20: 1916-1918.

Volumes 21-22

- *Anfās-i ‘Īsā*, compiled by Mawlānā Muḥammad ‘Īsā of Allahabad (the preface, written upon the completion of this two-volume collection, is dated 1933).

Volume 23

- *Malḡūzāt-i kamālāt-i Ashrafiyya*, compiled by Mawlānā Muḥammad ‘Īsā of Allahabad

Volume 24

- *Majālis-i Ḥakīm al-ummat*, compiled by Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘ (1929-1939)

Volume 25

- *Jamīl al-kalām* (recollections of Thanvī’s *malḡūzāt* during his 1938 visit to Lucknow), compiled by Muftī Jamīl Aḥmad Thānvī.
- *As‘ad al-abrār* (recollections of Thānvī’s *malḡūzāt* during his 1938 visit to Lucknow), compiled by Mawlānā Abrār al-Ḥaqq of Hardoi.
- *Ā’ina-yi tarbiyat* (a summary of the contents of Thānvī’s book, *Tarbiyat al-sālik* (first published in *Al-Imdād*, a journal published by his ṣūfī lodge), compiled by Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Ḥayy (1928).

Volume 26

- *Al-Kalām al-ḥasan*, compiled by Muftī Muḥammad Ḥasan of Amritsar (of Lahore, Pakistan after the partition of India)

Volumes 27 and 28 (in one binding)

- *Al-Raḥīq fī sawā' al-ṭarīq* (this collection consisted of excerpts from Thānvī's sermons that appeared in *Al-Imdād*, the monthly organ of his ṣūfī lodge).

Volume 29

- *Majālis al-ḥikma*, compiled by Mawlānā Muḥammad Mustafā Bijnorī (1914).
- *Bazm-i jamshed*, compiled by Waṣal Bilgrāmī of Lucknow (1938-39 but includes *malfūzāt* toward the end from the 1910s as well).

Volume 30

- *Safar-nāmeḥ-yi Lahore wa Lucknow*, compiled by Waṣal Bilgrāmī (1938).
- *Safar-nāmeḥ-yi Hyderabad Deccan*, compiled by Mawlānā Nūr Muḥammad (1923).
- *Maktūbāt-i Ḥusn al-'azīz* (1916).
- *Al-Raqīm al-jalīl*, compiled by Mawlānā Jalīl Aḥmad Sherwānī (1936).

Volume 31

- *Ashraf al-malfūzāt fī marḍ al-wafāt*, compiled by Muftī Muḥammad Shafī' (23 May 1943 to 17 June 1943)
- *Malfūzāt-i ṭayyibāt*
- *Ṣad pand Ashraf* (excerpts from *Tarbiyat al-sālik*)
- *Al-Qawl al-jalīl*, compiled by Mawlānā Jalīl Aḥmad Sherwānī.

- *Malfūẓāt*, narrated by ‘Allāma Shams al-Ḥaqq Afghānī and compiled by Şūfī Muḥammad Iqbāl Qurayshī (who was a spiritual successor of Muftī Muḥammad Shaft‘)

Appendix IV: Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī’s Ṣūfī Successors (*khulafā’*)

The following two lists reflect a distinction Thānvī made between his *khulafā’*: the authority to initiate others into his ṣūfī order and the authority to counsel lay Muslims.

Note: names of places reflect contemporary usage.

I. Thānvī’s Disciples who were “authorized to initiate others” (*majāzīn-i bay‘at*) into the Chistiyya-Ṣabiriyya-Imdādiyya-Ashrafiyya Ṣūfī order:

1. Mawlānā Muḥammad ‘Īsā of Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, India¹
2. Mawlānā Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ghanī of Phūlpūr, Uttar Pradesh, India²
3. Ḥājī Shēr Muḥammad of Sukkur, Sind, Pakistan³
4. Mawlānā Ḥakīm Muḥammad Muṣṭafā of Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh, India⁴

¹ Muḥammad ‘Īsā Allahabādī, son of Mīr Sayyid Khayrāt ‘Alī, was born in 1882. He completed his primary, secondary, and postsecondary education in Allahabad. He first met Thānvī during the latter’s sermon trip to Allahabad in 1906. His encounter with Thānvī left him longing to become a religious scholar. He pursued his initial theological studies with Mawlānā Nūr Muḥammad of Fatehpur (a spiritual successor of Mawlānā Shāh Faḍl al-Raḥmān Ganjmurāḍabādī) and then travelled to Lucknow to complete his studies with Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Bārī Faranghī Mahallī (1878-1926). Muḥammad ‘Īsā Allahabādī served as a professor of religious sciences from 1922 to 1937. Thānvī entrusted him with spiritual authorization in 1912. Muḥammad ‘Īsā Allahabādī suffered a stroke in 1940, after which he underwent treatment in Jaunpur under the supervision of Thānvī’s successor, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy ‘Ārifī. Muḥammad ‘Īsā Allahabādī died in Jaunpur in March 1944 (Sa‘īd, *Bazm-i Ashraf ke chirāgh*, 228-230; Bukhārī, *Kārwān-i Thānvī*, 122-123).

² Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ghanī Phūlpūrī was born in Azamgarh in 1293 AH. His family was devoted to the observance of sacred law and mysticism (his paternal grandfather was the disciple of Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Subḥān whose spiritual genealogy reached Mirzā Mazhar Jān-i Jānan). Phūlpūrī’s father, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, sent his son to receive religious education in Jaunpur under the supervision of Mawlānā Abū’l-Khayr Makkī (the son of Mawlānā Sakhāwat ‘Alī, a spiritual successor of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd of Raebareli). Phūlpūrī studied in Jaunpur for two years, after which he proceeded to study with Mawlānā Sayyid Amin al-Dīn of Nasirabad (a village near Raebareli). He studied further texts at Madrasa Jāmi‘ al-‘Ulūm in Kanpur and completed his education at the Madrasa ‘Āliya in Rampur, specializing in the study of the rational sciences (*ma‘qūlāt*). After teaching the religious sciences in Jaunpur for five years, Phūlpūrī established several mini-madrasas in the villages of Phūlpūr and Sarāi Mīr (near Azamgarh). Phūlpūrī and Thānvī were mutually devoted to each other, and the ṣūfī master praised the disciple’s character and piety. Phūlpūrī trained several leading ṣūfīs of his day, including Ḥakīm Muḥammad Akhtar (d. 2013). Phūlpūrī died in Karachi in 1963 (Sa‘īd, *Bazm-i Ashraf ke chirāgh*, 104-107; Bukhārī, *Kārwān-i Thānvī*, 85-87). Phūlpūrī wrote this tract on Thānvī’s teaching: ‘Abd al-Ghanī Phūlpūrī, *Uṣūl-i taṣawwuf* (Lahore: Idāra-yi Islāmiyyat, 1983). For Phūlpūrī’s teachings, consult: Ḥakīm Muḥammad Akhtar, *Ma‘rifat-i ilāhiyya* (Karachi: Kutub Khāna Mazharī, 1996); Ḥakīm Muḥammad Akhtar, *Malfūzāt-i ḥazrat Mawlānā Shāh ‘Abd al-Ghanī* (Karachi: Kutub Khāna Mazharī, n.d.).

³ Shēr Muḥammad was born in 1300 AH. His father, Sayyid Muḥammad ‘Ārif Shāh, was a scholar of Persian literature and renowned for his piety and hospitality. Shēr Muḥammad studied the Sindhi translation of the Qur’ān and learned sacred law from Persian texts. He was also an avid reader of Thānvī’s books and legal responsa. Thānvī initiated him into his ṣūfī order during a trip to the city of Khairpur (in present-day Sind, Pakistan). Shēr Muḥammad’s love for the Prophet was intense and thus in the early 1950s he migrated to Medina where he spent the last fourteen years of his life. He died in 1386 AH in Medina (Sa‘īd, *Bazm-i Ashraf ke chirāgh*, 58-60; Bukhārī, *Kārwān-i Thānvī*, 53-54).

5. Mawlānā Afḍal ‘Alī of Barabankī district, Uttar Pardesh, India
6. Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Majīd Bichrānwī⁵
7. Khwāja ‘Azīz al-Ḥasan Ghawrī of Lucknow, Uttar Pardesh, India⁶
8. Mawlānā Zafar Aḥmad of Thāna Bhawan, Uttar Pardesh, India⁷
9. Mawlānā Ḥabīb Allāh⁸
10. Mawlānā Muḥammad Ishāq of Burdwan, West Bengal, India⁹

⁴ Ḥakīm Muḥammad Muṣṭafā of Bijnor was Thānvī’s student from Kanpur. He played a major role in transmitting Thānvī’s teaching: he was Thānvī’s first disciple to write down the master’s words. He wrote Thānvī’s Urdu sermons in Arabic, and later translated them to Urdu. Arabic expression, he believed, was swift enough to move with the pace of Thānvī’s Urdu sermons. Apart from excelling in the traditional and rational disciplines, he was also a master of Indo-Greek medicine and practiced the craft in Meerut. Thānvī was full of praise for his intellectual capacities and trusted his Arabic-Urdu translation skills (Sa‘īd, *Bazm-i Ashraf ke chirāgh*, 173-177).

⁵ Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Majīd hailed from a Rajput family of Moradabad. He abandoned everything—his family, land, and hometown—to devote himself entirely to a life of devotion and mystical solitude. He pursued the spiritual path as a disciple of Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī. After the latter’s death, he pledged allegiance to Thānvī and remained in Thana Bhawan for the rest of his life. Thānvī often sent ‘Abd al-Majīd on proselytization trips, including trips to counter the *shuddi* (re-conversion of Muslims to Hinduism) movement spearheaded by the Arya Samaj leader Swami Shraddhanand (1856-1926). ‘Abd al-Majīd was also responsible for editing and publishing Thānvī’s *Tarbiyat al-sālik*. ‘Abd al-Majīd was a man of intense mystical experiences and insights, which he acquired after passing through several humiliating tribulations in Thānvī’s ṣūfī lodge. He died in 1952 (Sa‘īd, *Bazm-i Ashraf ke chirāgh*, 61-63; Bukhārī, *Kārwan-i Thānvī*, 89-90).

⁶ ‘Azīz al-Ḥasan Ghawrī was born in June 1884. He was a graduate of Aligarh Muslim University and initially met Thānvī in Allahabad in 1326 AH. After hearing Thānvī’s sermons, he experienced a spiritual revolution and devoted his entire energy to emulate the ṣūfī master. Thānvī was appreciative of Ghawrī’s devotion and praised his passion and loyalty. Ghawrī was an accomplished Urdu mystical poet and the author of Thānvī’s four-volume biography titled *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ*. He died in August 1944 (Aḥmad Sa‘īd, *Zikr-i Majzūb: Tazkirah-yi Khwāja ‘Azīz al-Ḥasan Majzūb Ghawrī* [Lahore: Maktaba-yi Iḥyā al-‘ulūm al-sharqiyya, 1974]).

⁷ Zafar Aḥmad ‘Usmānī (1892-1974) was a leading South Asian Ḥadīth scholar and Ḥanafī jurist. He was Thānvī’s nephew and had the privilege of accompanying the ṣūfī master on many lecture tours. He completed his studies in three *madrasas*: Imdād al-‘Ulūm in Thana Bhawan, Jāmi‘ al-‘Ulūm in Kanpur, and Maẓāhir al-‘Ulūm in Saharanpur. His teachers included his maternal uncle, Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, the latter’s student, Muḥammad Ishāq Burdwānī, and Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī, among many others. Zafar Aḥmad took a keen interest in ṣūfism and pursued spiritual relationships with both Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī and Thānvī. Both luminaries granted him spiritual succession. Zafar Aḥmad was an accomplished Ḥadīth professor, legal theorist, ṣūfī mentor, religious author, and political activist. His voluminous Arabic work, *I‘lā al-sunan*, demonstrated his mastery in the fields of Muslim sacred law and prophetic traditions. South Asian and Middle Eastern publishers and editors have disseminated this seminal text. His other notable literary contributions included an Urdu biography of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj and several translations of Arabic mystical texts. He migrated to Pakistan after the partition of India, and his students and disciples hailed from both East and West Pakistan. Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘ performed his funeral prayer and he was buried in Karachi, next to the grave of Shāh ‘Abd al-Ghanī Phūlpūrī (‘Abd al-Shukūr Tirmizī, *Tazkirat al-Zafar* [Faisalabad: Maṭbū‘āt ‘Ilmī Kamālīyya, 1977]).

⁸ Ḥabīb Allāh was born in the Azamgarh district of Uttar Pardesh. He taught Persian at a government high school in the Jalaun district of the same province. He was an avid reader of Thānvī’s books and devoted himself to embodying and disseminating the ṣūfī master’s teaching. He died in Sukkur, Sind, Pakistan in 1960 (Sa‘īd, *Bazm-i Ashraf ke chirāgh*, 94-98).

⁹ Muḥammad Ishāq was born in 1865. He acquired preliminary education in Persian, Bangla, and Arabic in Burdwan before proceeding to study more advanced texts in Bihar. He then arrived in Kanpur to study at the Madrasa Jāmi‘ al-‘Ulūm, where he studied extensively with Thānvī. Muḥammad Ishāq

11. Mawlānā Wāḥid Bakhsh of Khairpur Tamewali, Punjab, Pakistan¹⁰
12. Ḥājī Shamsḥād of Thāna Bhawan, Uttar Pardesh, India
13. Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh Khān of Bhopal, Madhya Pardesh, India
14. Sayyid Fakhr al-Dīn Shāh of Sukkur, Sind, Pakistan
15. Mawlānā Saghīr Muḥammad of Bangladesh
16. Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd of North Wazīristān, Pakistan
17. Mawlānā Aṭhar ‘Alī of Sylhet, Bangladesh¹¹
18. Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Wahhāb of Hathazārī, Chittagong, Bangladesh¹²
19. Abū’l Barakāt of Sultānpūr, Uttar Pardesh, India
20. Mawlānā Nazīr Aḥmad of Karnāl, Haryana, India¹³

graduated in 1892, after which Thānvī entrusted him with teaching traditional and rational texts at Madrasa Jāmi‘ al-‘Ulūm. During this time, he taught several texts to Zafar Aḥmad ‘Usmānī who later praised his teacher’s expertise in Ḥadīth. He continued teaching in Kanpur until 1910, when he was commissioned to teach the religious sciences at Calcutta’s Madrasa ‘Āliya. In 1919, he accepted a teaching position the Madrasa ‘Āliya in Dhaka. During this time, he continued correspondence with Thānvī and also visited the master’s ṣūfī lodge at least once per year. Thānvī respected his deep learning and requested him to deliver sermons in his ṣūfī lodge. Muḥammad Ishāq continued teaching at various institutions in Dhaka, including Dhaka University, until his death in 1939 (Sa‘īd, *Bazm-i Ashraf ke chirāgh*, 204-214; Bukhārī, *Kārwān-i Thānvī*, 104-105).

¹⁰ Wāḥid Bakhsh was born in southern Punjab in 1890. After acquiring traditional knowledge in his hometown and various other cities (including Bahawalpur and Amroha), he journeyed to Deoband where he studied with Mawlānā Maḥmūd Ḥasan, Mawlānā Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī, and Mawlānā Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī. After a short teaching stint in Uttar Pardesh, he returned to southern Punjab. In 1925, he was appointed a lecturer of Islamic studies at the Madrasa ‘Arabiyya in Ahmadpur East, where he taught for the following three decades. He preferred simplicity in all things and strictly followed sacred law in everyday life (Sa‘īd, *Bazm-i Ashraf ke chirāgh*, 165-170).

¹¹ Mawlānā Aṭhar ‘Alī was born in 1891 in a *sharīf* family of Sylhet (present-day Bangladesh). His father, Mawlānā ‘Azīm Khān, served as the *imām* of a local mosque and was renowned for his piety. Aṭhar ‘Alī initiated his religious studies in Sylhet but then proceeded to study the texts of the *dars-i nizāmī* curriculum at several North Indian *madrasas*, including Madrasa ‘Āliya in Rampur and Madrasa Mazāhir al-‘Ulūm in Saharanpur. He then enrolled at the Deoband seminary to study sacred law and Ḥadīth with Mawlānā Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī (d. 1933), Mawlānā Shabbīr Aḥmad ‘Usmānī (d. 1949), and Mawlānā Rasūl Khān Hazārī (d. 1971). After graduating from Deoband, Aṭhar ‘Alī acquired spiritual training under Thānvī’s supervision and was authorized as a spiritual successor in 1920. Upon his return to his homeland, Aṭhar ‘Alī actively engaged in teaching the religious sciences and counselling disciples. In 1945, he founded the Madrasa Imdād al-‘Ulūm in Kishoreganj (later renamed Al-Jāmi‘a al-Imdādiyya). He supported the Muslim League during the Partition of India. He was tortured in state prisons of independent Bangladesh from 1971 to 1973. He died in 1976 and was buried in Kishoreganj (Shafīq al-Raḥmān Jalālabādī, *Hayat-i Aṭhar: sawānīḥ mujahid-i millat ḥaṣrat Mawlānā Aṭhar ‘Alī* [Karachi: Kutub Khāna Mazharī, n.d.]).

¹² ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was born in 1901 in the district of Chittagong (present-day Bangladesh). Beginning in 1920, he spent four years completing the *dars-i nizāmī* curriculum at the Deoband seminary, where his teachers included Mawlānā Rasūl Khān Hazārī, Mawlānā Shabbīr Aḥmad ‘Usmānī, and Mawlānā Murtaṣṣā Ḥasan of Chandpur. He studied Ḥadīth with Mawlānā Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī and Mawlānā Muḥammad Zakariyya Kandhlavī. After completing his religious education, he spent a year in Thānvī’s ṣūfī lodge. The ṣūfī master authorized him with spiritual succession nine months into this yearlong stay (Sa‘īd, *Bazm-i Ashraf ke chirāgh*, 374).

¹³ Nazīr Aḥmad was born in the district of Karnal (Haryana, India) around 1893. He pursued his education in Persian and Urdu in his hometown and then enrolled to complete the *dars-i nizāmī* curriculum at Delhi’s Madrasa Amīniyya. His teachers included Mawlānā Amīn al-Dīn and Muftī Muḥammad

21. Mawlānā Rafī‘ al-Dīn of Allāhabād, Uttar Pardesh, India
22. Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Salām of Nowshera, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan¹⁴
23. Mawlānā Muḥammad Mūsā Muhājir-i Madanī (migrant to Medina)
24. Mawlānā Ḥusn al-Dīn of Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India
25. Mawlānā Muḥammad Sa‘īd of Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India
26. Mawlānā Nazīr Aḥmad of Kairana, Uttar Pardesh, India
27. Mawlānā Maqṣūd Allāh of Barisal, Bangladesh
28. Mawlānā Waṣī Allāh of Azamgarh, Uttar Pardesh, India¹⁵
29. Muftī Muḥammad Ḥasan of Amritsar, Punjab, India¹⁶

Kifāyatullah. After graduation he taught religious sciences in Delhi for many years, after which he returned to his hometown in Karnal (Sa‘īd, *Bazm-i Ashraf ke chirāgh*, 375-376).

¹⁴ ‘Abd al-Salām was born in April 1903 in present-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (Pakistan). He studied the preliminary texts of the *dars-i nizāmī* curriculum with his father and uncle. He completed his religious education in various seminaries of North India and graduated from a *madrasa* in Delhi. Thānvī attended this *madrasa*’s graduation ceremony and gifted each graduate clothes and books. ‘Abd al-Salām’s heart was captured by this act of generosity and he longed to reunite with Thānvī after returning to his homeland. Without informing anyone but his wife, ‘Abd al-Salām left his homeland and travelled to Thana Bhawan to pursue the spiritual path under Thānvī’s supervision. After spending months in Thānvī’s ṣūfī lodge, he was authorized with spiritual succession, after which he returned to his homeland. He continued teaching and counselling others until his death (Sa‘īd, *Bazm-i Ashraf ke chirāgh*, 370-373).

¹⁵ Shāh Waṣī Allāh (1893-1967) was born in Fatehpur Talnarja (Azamgarh district, Uttar Pardesh). He memorized the Qur’ān in his hometown and initiated his religious studies in Kanpur. He enrolled at the Deoband seminary in 1913 where his teachers included Mawlānā Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī, Mawlānā Shabbīr Aḥmad ‘Usmānī, Mawlānā Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Balyāwī, Mawlānā Murtaḍā Ḥasan Chāndpūrī, Sayyid Aṣghar Ḥusayn, and Mawlānā I‘zāz ‘Alī. Waṣī Allāh was a disciplined student who spent his leisure time in solitude, meditation, and study. He joined Thānvī’s ṣūfī fellowship after graduating from Deoband in 1917. At Thānvī’s ṣūfī lodge, Waṣī Allāh completed his spiritual training and also taught *dars-i nizāmī* texts. Thānvī authorized him to initiate others and praised his devotion and insight. After teaching at various *madrāsas* from 1917 to 1932, Waṣī Allāh settled in his hometown to train disciples and teach religious texts. In 1956, he relocated to Gorakhpur, Uttar Pardesh. The last decade of his life—from late 1977 to 1967—was spent in the city of Allahabad, where he gained widespread popularity among Muslims. People from all socio-economic backgrounds sought his counsel. He spent the last year of his life between Allahabad and Mumbai, from where he embarked on his final trip to Mecca. He died during this sea voyage and his body was disposed in the Red Sea. According to Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib Qāsimī, Shāh Waṣī Allāh was a true saint who had predicted this end, for during his last years he used to recite Mirzā Ghālīb’s couplet: “Death has disgraced me; why did not I drown in a sea?/No funeral procession and no tomb there would have been for me” (I‘jāz Aḥmad, “Muṣliḥ al-ummat ḥaṣrat mawlānā Shāh Waṣī Allāh Faṭhpūrī,” in Muḥammad Akbar Shāh Bukhārī, *Chalīs barey musulmān* [Karachi: Idārat al-Qur’ān, 2001], 2:143-155; Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib Qāsimī, *Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband kī Pachās misālī shakhṣiyāt*, ed. Muḥammad Akbar Shāh Bukhārī [Multan: Idāra-yi Ta’līfāt-i Ashrafiyya, 1997], 169).

¹⁶ Muftī Muḥammad Ḥasan (1878-1961) was born in a village near Hasan Abdal. His father, Mawlānā Allāh Dād, was a respectable Ḥadīth scholar and mystic. Muḥammad Ḥasan studied Arabic and Persian texts with Mawlānā Muḥammad Ma‘ṣūm, first in Hazara and then in Amritsar where the latter scholar had relocated to teach at the Madrasa Ghaznawiyya. After studying Ḥadīth and sacred law with renowned scholarly saints in Amritsar, Muḥammad Ḥasan enrolled at Deoband to study with Mawlānā Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī. After completing his religious education, he served as a professor at Madrasa Ghaznawiyya, where he taught for 48 years. Muftī Muḥammad Shaftī compared Muḥammad Ḥasan’s morning Qur’ān lectures in Amritsar to Thānvī’s daily gatherings in Thana Bhawan. Muḥammad Ḥasan completed his ṣūfī training with Thānvī and was authorized to initiate others. After the partition of India, he migrated to Lahore, Pakistan, where he founded Jāmi‘a Ashrafiyya. His students and disciples included: Sayyid ‘Aṭā Allāh Shāh Bukhārī, Faqīr Muḥammad of Peshawar, Shams al-Ḥaqq Afghānī, Sayyid Najm al-

30. Mawlānā Sirāj Aḥmad Khān of Amroha, Uttar Pardesh, India
31. Mawlānā Mumtāz Aḥmad
32. Munshī Ḥaqq Dād Khān of Lucknow, Uttar Pardesh, India
33. Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Jabbār of Firozpur, Punjab, India
34. Mawlānā Walī Aḥmad of Attock, Pakistan
35. Mawlānā Khayr Muḥammad of Jalandhar, Punjab, India¹⁷
36. Mawlānā Ghulām Ṣiddīq of Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, Pakistan
37. Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Raḥmān of Attock, Pakistan¹⁸
38. Mawlānā Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib Qāsimī of Deoband, Uttar Pardesh, India¹⁹
39. Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘ of Deoband, Uttar Pardesh, India²⁰

Ḥasan Thānvī, and Ṣūfī Muḥammad Sarwar (Muḥammad Akbar Shāh Bukhārī, *Ḥaḍrat mawlānā Muḥammad Ḥasan Amritsarī awr unke mashāhir talāmiza wa khulafā’* [Multan: Idāra-yi Ta’līfāt-i Ashrafiyya, n.d.]).

¹⁷ Khayr Muḥammad (1895-1970) was born in Jalandhar, Punjab, India. He acquired piety and knowledge early on in life from his maternal uncle, Miyan Shāh Muḥammad, a devoted disciple of Mawlānā Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī. Khayr Muḥammad completed traditional religious studies at the Madrasa Ishā‘at al-‘Ulūm in Bareilly (Uttar Pardesh). He joined Thānvī’s ṣūfī fellowship in 1925. With Thānvī’s blessings, Khayr Muḥammad founded Madrasa Khayr al-Madāris in Jalandhar in 1931. He relocated to Multan, Pakistan in 1947, where he founded Jāmi‘ Khayr al-Madāris, a leading Deobandī madrasa in contemporary Pakistan (Bukhārī, *‘Akābir-i ‘ulamā’-yi Deoband*, 227-235).

¹⁸ Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Raḥmān of Attock (Kāmilpūrī—after Campbellpur [now Attock]) was born in 1882. After acquiring religious education in his hometown and studying with some of the leading Islamic scholars of the Punjab and the Northwest Frontier, he enrolled at the Madrasa Mazāhir al-‘Ulūm in Saharanpur. He studied with the Ḥadīth scholar Mawlānā Khalīl Aḥmad (d. 1927) and took the latter to be his first ṣūfī master. After graduating from Madrasa Mazāhir al-‘Ulūm, he pursued advanced studies at the Deoband seminary with Mawlānā Maḥmūd Ḥasan and Mawlānā Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī. He turned to Thānvī in 1928 and received the latter’s permission to initiate others. Thānvī had immense respect for ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Kāmilpūrī’s learning and piety and directed his biographer to preserve his correspondence with ‘Abd al-Raḥmān in *Ashraf al-sawānih*. After the partition of India, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Kāmilpūrī taught religious sciences in Multan (at Madrasa Khayr al-Madāris, from 1947 to 1950) and Tando Allahyar, Sind (at Dār al-‘Ulūm Islāmiyya, from 1950 to 1955). He then retired in his hometown and died in December 1965 (*Bazm*, 164). For a detailed biography, see Sa‘īd al-Raḥmān, *Tajalliyāt-i Raḥmānī* (Karachi, 1971).

¹⁹ Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib Qāsimī was born in 1897. His father and grandfather, Ḥāfiẓ Muḥammad Aḥmad and Mawlānā Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī, respectively, were Deobandī luminaries (the latter was one of the founders of the Deoband seminary). Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib thus completed his entire education at the Deoband seminary, where he studied with Mawlānā Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī, Muftī ‘Azīz al-Raḥmān ‘Usmānī, Mawlānā Shabbūr Aḥmad ‘Usmānī, and Mawlānā Sayyid Aṣghar Ḥusayn Deobandī. Traditional theology was Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib’s forte and he had a unique penchant for oratory and composition. He served as the *muhtamim* (president) of the Deoband seminary from the late 1920s to the early 1980s. He received spiritual succession from Thānvī in 1931. Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib authored scores of books, including a seminal work on the basic creedal and ideological teaching of the Deoband School. He died in 1983 (Sa‘īd, *Bazm-i Ashraf ke chīrāgh*, 71-74; Bukhārī, *‘Akābir-i ‘ulamā’-yi Deoband*, 276-278).

²⁰ Muḥammad Shafī‘ (1897-1976) was a distinguished Muslim jurist of colonial India and post-colonial Pakistan. His father, Mawlānā Muḥammad Yāsīn, was a scholar of repute who taught Persian texts at the Deoband seminary. Muḥammad Shafī‘ completed his religious education at Deoband where he studied with Mawlānā Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī, Muftī ‘Azīz al-Raḥmān ‘Usmānī, Mawlānā Shabbūr Aḥmad ‘Usmānī, and Mawlānā Rasūl Khān Hazārī. After graduating with high distinction, he rose among the ranks of teachers at Deoband and also became renowned as a *muftī* (jurisconsult). Muḥammad Shafī‘ was extremely devoted to Thānvī, becoming his disciple in 1920 and his successor in 1930. Thānvī respected his learning and co-authored many legal tracts with him. Muḥammad Shafī‘ migrated to Pakistan after the

40. Mawlānā Muḥammad Nabiyuhu of Moradabad, Uttar Pardesh, India
41. Mawlānā Muḥammad Ṣābir of Rewari, Haryana, India
42. Nawāb Aḥmad ‘Alī Khān of Sahāranpūr, Uttar Pardesh, India
43. Ḥakīm Karam Ḥusayn of Sitapur, Uttar Pardesh, India
44. Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Raḥmān of Allahabad, Uttar Pardesh, India
45. Muḥammad ‘Usmān Khān of Delhi, India
46. Qubūl Aḥmad of Sitapur, Uttar Pardesh, India
47. Mawlānā Jalīl Aḥmad of Aligarh, Uttar Pardesh, India
48. Mawlānā Ishāq ‘Alī of Kanpur, Uttar Pardesh, India
49. Shihāb al-Dīn of Meerut, Uttar Pardesh, India
50. Mawlānā Masīḥ Allāh Khān of Jalalabad, Uttar Pardesh, India²¹
51. Mawlānā Murtaẓā Ḥasan of Chāndpūr, Uttar Pardesh, India²²
52. Ḥakīm ‘Abd al-Khāliq of Urmar Tanda, Punjab, India
53. Sāmin ‘Alī Sandaylwī of Kanpur, Uttar Pardesh, India
54. Ḥāfiẓ ‘Ināyat ‘Alī of Ludhyāna, Punjab, India
55. Mawlānā Walī Muḥammad of Gurdāspūr, Punjab, India
56. Mawlānā Nūr Bakhsh of Chittagong, Bangladesh
57. Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Wudūd of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan
58. Mawlānā As‘ad Allāh of Rāmpūr, Uttar Pardesh, India
59. ‘Azīz al-Raḥmān of Meerut, Uttar Pardesh, India
60. Mawlānā Ḥakīm Ilāhī Bakhsh of Shikārpūr, Sind, Pakistan
61. Muḥammad Sharīf of Hoshiarpur, Punjab, India
62. Shēr Muḥammad of Hoshiarpur, Punjab, India
63. Ḥāfiẓ Walī Muḥammad of Kannauj, Uttar Pardesh, India
64. Mawlānā Kifāyat Allāh

partition of India and settled in Karachi where he founded Dār al-‘Ulūm Karachi, one of the largest Deobandī *madrasas* of South Asia. His Urdu and Arabic writings numbered more than 150 and his students included leading Deobandī scholars (Muḥammad Rafī‘ ‘Usmānī, *Ḥayāt-i Muftī-yi A‘ẓam* [Karachi: Idārat al-Ma‘ārif, 1994]; Muḥammad Taqī ‘Usmānī, *Meray wālid meray shaykh awr unkā mizāj wa mazāq* [Karachi: Idārat al-Ma‘ārif, 2001]; Muḥammad Rāshid, *Ma‘āsir-i Muftī-yi A‘ẓam Pākistān* [Lahore: Idāra-yi Islāmiyyat, 2002]).

²¹ Masīḥ Allāh Khān (1912-1992) completed his traditional religious education at the Deoband seminary in the early 1930s. Thānvī authorized him to train disciples in 1931. From 1938 to his death in 1992, Masīḥ Allāh Khān taught and trained hundreds of students and disciples at the Madrasa Miftāḥ al-‘Ulūm in Jalalabad, Uttar Pardesh, India. He summarized his ṣūfī master’s teaching in *Sharī‘at wa taṣawwuf* (*Sacred Law and Mysticism*), which has been translated into English: Masīḥ Allāh Khān, *The Path to Perfection: An Edited Anthology of the Spiritual Teachings of Ḥakīm al-Umma Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānawī* (Santa Barbara: White Thread Press, 2005).

²² Murtaẓā Ḥasan of Chandpur (ca. 1869-1951) was a leading Deobandī theologian. He was an early graduate of the Deoband seminary, where his teachers included Mawlānā Muḥammad Ya‘qūb Nānautvī, Mawlānā Maḥmūd Ḥasan, and Mawlānā Zulfiqār ‘Alī Deobandī. Murtaẓā Ḥasan studied prophetic traditions with Mawlānā Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī and passionately pursued the study of logic and philosophy with Mawlānā Aḥmad Ḥasan Amrohī. Murtaẓā Ḥasan taught *dars-i niẓāmī* texts in the city of Muradabad until 1920, when he joined the Deoband seminary as a senior professor. He was renowned for his public debates with Arya Samaj scholars and his polemical works against Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad of Qadiyan. His first ṣūfī master was Mawlānā Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, after whose death he pursued the spiritual path under the supervision of Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Raipūrī. When the latter saint died in 1919, Murtaẓā Ḥasan pledged allegiance to Thānvī (Bukhārī, *‘Akābir-i ‘ulamā’-yi Deoband*, 120-124).

65. Mawlānā Ḥamīd Ḥasan of Amroha, Uttar Pardesh, India
66. Ḥakīm Faḏl Allāh of Shikārpūr, Sindh, Pakistan
67. Bābū ‘Abd al-‘Azīz
68. Mawlānā Muḥammad Rasūl Khān Hazārī²³
69. Mawlānā Muḥammad Allāh Nawakhlī of Dhaka, Bangladesh
70. Ḥakīm Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Ḥaq Khān
71. Ḥakīm Khalīl Aḥmad of Sahāranpūr, Uttar Pardesh, India
72. Maḥmūd al-Ghanī of Sahāranpūr, Uttar Pardesh, India
73. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥayy ‘Ārifī²⁴
74. Mawlānā Sayyid Sulaymān Nadvī²⁵
75. Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Bārī Nadvī²⁶
76. Mawlānā Abrār al-Ḥaq of Hardoi, Uttar Pardesh, India²⁷

²³ Mawlānā Rasūl Khān Hazārī was a renowned teacher of rational and traditional disciplines who taught at various religious and secular institutions in South Asia from around 1905 to 1971. He was born in Hazara (present-day Pakistan) in 1871. He acquired knowledge from his father, Mawlānā Maḥmūd ‘Alī b. Muḥammad Gul Khān. He studied the bulk of the *dars-i niẓamī* curriculum in Hazara before proceeding to study with Mawlānā Maḥmūd Ḥasan at the Deoband seminary. After graduating from Deoband in 1905, he taught for nine years at Meerut’s Madrasa Imdād al-Islām. His fame as an astounding teacher of the rational sciences brought him back to Deoband, where he was appointed a professor in 1915. He taught many of the leading Deobandī scholars of the twentieth century, including Muftī Muḥammad Shaḥīd, and was thus dubbed “Teacher of All” (*ustād-i kul*). In 1935, Rasūl Khān Hazārī accepted a professorship at Lahore’s Oriental College, where he taught Islamic studies until his retirement in 1954. From 1954 to his death in 1971, he remained busy teaching religious sciences at Lahore’s Jāmi‘a Ashrafiyya. According to his students, he possessed unmatched mastery of arcane theoretical texts and excelled in unpacking terse philosophical and logical passages. For his spiritual reformation, he turned to Thānvī who authorized him with spiritual succession (Qārī Fuyūẓ al-Raḥmān, *Sawāniḥ ḥaẓrat mawlānā Muḥammad Rasūl Khān Hazārī* [Lahore: Pakistan Book Depot, 1973]).

²⁴ Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥayy ‘Ārifī

²⁵ Sayyid Sulaymān Nadvī (1884-1953) was a major Muslim historian and scholar of high repute. He completed advanced studies at Dār al-‘Ulūm Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ from 1901 to 1906, where he had the opportunity to study with the Muslim historian Shiblī Nu‘mānī (d. 1914). He completed volumes three to six of the latter’s *Sīrat al-Nabī*, the foremost Urdu biography of the Prophet Muḥammad. Sayyid Sulaymān Nadvī was an accomplished historian, journalist, and teacher who spent most of his time writing rigorously researched monographs on Islamic history and Muslim thought. He authored several detailed studies on foundational figures of Islam, including a volume on the Prophet’s wife, ‘Āisha. He turned to Thānvī late in his life, and recanted some of his earlier views that had departed from orthodox teachings. For a detailed biography, see Shāh Mu‘īn al-Dīn Aḥmad Nadvī, *Ḥayāt-i Sulaymān* (Azamgarh: Maṭba‘-yi Ma‘ārif Dār al-Muṣannifīn, 1973).

²⁶ Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Bārī Nadvī (1890-1976) was a graduate of the Dar al-‘Ulūm Nadwat al-‘Ulamā in Lucknow. I reproduce here Zaman’s excellent biographical note on him: “He was a professor of philosophy at Osmania University in Hyderabad, an institution that catered to a largely Muslim student population but focused on imparting modern, western learning in the Urdu language. ‘Abd al-Bari had written a book on the English philosopher George Berkeley (d. 1753), and had translated Berkeley’s *Principles of Human Knowledge*, Descartes’ *Discours de la méthode*, and John Dewey and James H. Tufts’ *Ethics* into Urdu for use by university students. Unusually among his Indian contemporaries, he was reputed to have made enough money simply from his publications to be able to build a lavish mansion in Lucknow...He is best known, however, as the author of no less than four books in which he explicated various facets of Thanawi’s thought and teachings some years after the master’s death” (Zaman, *Ashraf ‘Ali Thanawi*, 103-104).

²⁷ Abrār al-Ḥaq of Hardoi (d. 2005) outlived all other successors of his ṣūfī master. He was a graduate of Madrasa Maẓāhir al-‘Ulūm in Saharanpur. After graduation, he founded Madrasa Ashraf al-

77. Mawlānā Faqīr Muḥammad of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan²⁸

II. Thānvī's Disciples who were "authorized to counsel lay Muslims" (*majāzīn-i ṣuḥbat*):

1. Sa'īd Aḥmad Khān
2. Ḥāfīz 'Alī Naẓar Bēg
3. Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥasan of Lucknow, Uttar Pardesh, India
4. Mawlānā Maḥmūd al-Ḥaqq of Hardoi, Uttar Pardesh, India
5. Munshī 'Abd al-Walī
6. Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abd al-Karīm
7. Muḥammad Jalīl of Sahāranpūr, Uttar Pardesh, India
8. Mawlānā Anwār al-Ḥasan of Lucknow, Uttar Pardesh, India
9. Munshī 'Alī Shākīr
10. Muḥammad Najm Aḥsan
11. Mawlānā Manfa'at 'Alī of Sahāranpūr, Uttar Pardesh, India
12. Munshī 'Alī Sajjād
13. Mazhar Aḥmad of Bhopal, Madhya Pardesh, India
14. Ḥāfīz Muḥammad Ṭāhā
15. Khwāja Muḥammad Ṣādiq
16. Munshī 'Abd al-Ṣubūr
17. Bakhshish Aḥmad
18. Ḥāfīz Laqā Allāh of Pānīpat, Haryana, India
19. Mawlānā Zuhūr al-Ḥasan of Sahāranpūr, Uttar Pardesh, India
20. Mawlānā Ashfāq al-Raḥmān Kāndhlavī
21. Mawlānā Sultān Maḥmūd of Delhi, India
22. Ḥāfīz Muḥammad Ismā'īl of Delhi, India
23. Munshī Muḥammad Ya'qūb
24. Mawlānā 'Abd al-Ṣamad of Varanasi, Uttar Pardesh, India
25. Mawlānā Ḥamīd Ḥasan of Malerkotla, Punjab, India
26. Mawlānā Riyāḍ al-Ḥasan of Meerut, Uttar Pardesh, India
27. Muḥammad Sa'īd of Gangōh, Uttar Pardesh, India
28. Munshī 'Abd al-Ḥamīd of Lucknow, Uttar Pardesh, India

Madāris in Hardoi, Uttar Pardesh, India. His students and disciples in South Asian and beyond numbered in the thousands.

²⁸ Faqīr Muḥammad was born in 1911 in Mohmand Agency (present-day Pakistan) to a family of religious scholars. After acquiring basic religious education in his tribal hometown, he travelled to Amritsar, where he spent ten years studying at the Madrasa Nu'māniyya with Thānvī's disciple and successor, Muftī Muḥammad Ḥasan. During this decade, Faqīr Muḥammad accompanied Muftī Muḥammad Ḥasan on many trips, including many retreats at Thānvī's ṣūfī lodge. Faqīr Muḥammad was an attentive listener with a tender heart who profusely wept during Thānvī's daily gatherings. He was thus called "the tearful" (*bakkā*) and Thānvī often praised him by saying: "You bring vitality to this place." Thānvī authorized him with spiritual succession in the late 1930s. After the partition of India, Faqīr Muḥammad settled outside of Peshawar where he spent his time teaching students and counselling disciples. Faqīr Muḥammad granted spiritual succession to many scholars, including: Mawlānā Salīm Allāh Khān, Mawlānā Sayyid Najm al-Ḥasan, Muftī Aḥmad al-Raḥmān, and Mawlānā 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ashrafī. Toward the end of his life, Faqīr Muḥammad founded the *madrassa* Jāmi'a Imdād al-'Ulūm in Peshawar (Bukhārī, *Akābir-i 'ulamā'-yi Deoband*, 350-351).

29. ‘Abd al-Ghafūr of Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India
30. Fayād ‘Alī
31. Mawlānā Maḥmūd Dāwūd Yūsuf of Rander, Gujrat, India
32. Mīr Imām al-Dīn
33. Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Majīd of Azamgarh, Uttar Pardesh, India
34. Mawlānā Muḥammad Miyan²⁹
35. Mawlānā Muḥammad Yūsuf Binawrī³⁰
36. ‘Alī Sājīd of Lucknow, Uttar Pardesh, India
37. Mawlānā Sa‘īd Aḥmad of Lucknow, Uttar Pardesh, India
38. Mawlānā Sayyid ‘Abd al-Karīm of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan
39. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ghaffār
40. Mawlānā Muḥammad Na‘īm of Kabul, Afghanistan
41. Mawlānā Sakhāwat Ḥusayn
42. Munshī ‘Irfān Aḥmad of Sahāranpūr, Uttar Pardesh, India
43. ‘Azīz al-Raḥmān
44. Shafīq Aḥmad of Gangōh, Uttar Pardesh, India
45. Shād Muḥammad of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan
46. Khwāja Wahīd Allāh
47. Muftī ‘Abd al-Karīm of Gumthala, Haryana, India
48. Sayyid Ḥasan of Lucknow, Uttar Pardesh, India
49. Mawlānā Sayyid Ḥasan
50. Mawlānā Mas‘ūd ‘Alī of ‘Azamgarh, Uttar Pardesh, India
51. Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Rashīd Maḥmūd Anṣārī of Gangōh, Uttar Pardesh, India³¹
52. Mawlānā Muḥammad Mas‘ūd of Gangōh, Uttar Pardesh, India
53. Manẓūr Aḥmad of Sahāranpūr, Uttar Pardesh, India
54. Bahā’ al-Dīn of Hardoi, Uttar Pardesh, India
55. Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Ghanī
56. Anwar Aḥmad
57. Quraishī Shafī’ Muḥammad of Hyderabad, Sind, Pakistan
58. Shāh Muḥammad ‘Alīm

²⁹ He was the grandson of Mawlānā Muḥammad Ḥusayn of Allahabad (who was a successor of Ḥājī Imdād Allāh).

³⁰ Muḥammad Yūsuf Binawrī (1908-1977) was a major South Asian Ḥadīth scholar. He studied the traditional curriculum at the Deoband seminary with Mawlānā Shabbīr Aḥmad ‘Usmānī, Mawlānā Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī, Muftī Muḥammad Shafī’, and Mawlānā Rasūl Khān Hazārī. He accompanied Kashmīrī to Gujrat to complete his Ḥadīth studies (Muḥammad Ismā‘īl Shujā‘abādī, *Muḥaddith al-‘aṣr ḥaẓrat Mawlānā Sayyid Muḥammad Yūsuf Binawrī: sawānīḥ wa afkār* [Multan: ‘Ālimī Majlis-i Taḥaffuz-i Khatm-i Nubuwwat, n.d.]).

³¹ He was the grandson of Mawlānā Rashīd Aḥmad Gangōhī.

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Biography

I have spent most of my life in three urbanscapes: Lahore, Louisville, and Raleigh-Durham. I pursued the study of philosophy and English literature at the University of Louisville, from 2000-2007, before immersing myself in religious studies at Duke University (2007-2015). My life revolves around two inter-related vocations: research and teaching. The following two citations capture the sort of research and teaching to which I aspire:

So it is perfectly clear that untrammelled curiosity is a more effective aid to learning than any pressure born from fear. By your laws, O God, this kind of pressure restricts the free flow of curiosity.

—St. Augustine, *Confessions*

Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for it this: to let learn. The real teacher, in fact, lets nothing else be learned than—learning. His conduct, therefore, often produces the impression that we properly learn nothing from him, if by ‘learning’ we now suddenly understand merely the procurement of useful information. The teacher is ahead of his apprentices in this alone, that he has far more to learn than they—he has to learn to let them learn. The teacher must be capable of being more teachable than the apprentices. The teacher is far less assured of his ground than those who learn are of theirs. If the relation between the teacher and the taught is genuine, therefore, there is never a place in it for the authority of the know-it-all or the authoritative sway of the official.

—Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*

Apart from being passionate about research and teaching within the disciplinary domains of theology and religious studies, I actively seek exposures to art and imagination, for being exposed to revelation is the greatest gift of all.